

WITH THE FOREIGN LEGION  
AT NARVIK

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*Légionnaires go on board*



# WITH THE FOREIGN LEGION AT NARVIK

By

CAPITAINE PIERRE O. LAPIE

*Croix de guerre*

TRANSLATED BY  
ANTHONY MERRYIN

FOREWORD BY  
MAJOR P. C. WREN

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## FOREWORD

**I**F the British Navy is a silent service, the French Foreign Legion is dumb.

This book is almost unique in being a voice, a cry almost, from the French Foreign Legion on active service. It is also a little pathetic, a little poignant, in being so brief, so sudden—like the voice from a ship that passes in the night.

The author, Captain Pierre O. Lapie, is fortunate in his mental and moral attitude, both to the War and to the Legion ; and the Legion is happy in having him, however briefly, for a chronicler of its doings—though the doings were but a side-show on a Front that fell, almost in a night, from being the centre of the world's breathless attention to being a negligible incident from a forgotten yesterday. Who, but the unfortunate Norwegians and the men who had fought for them, had time to think of Narvik, when the savage and brutal hordes overwhelmed Holland and Belgium and invaded France ?

Nevertheless, the Legion, as usual, did its work with the highest ability and courage, and with complete and brilliant success.

It defeated the German forces holding the heights round Narvik, dislodged them from their strong positions, and would have driven them

## FOREWORD

into Sweden and captivity, had it not been recalled to France in the hour of victory.

The account of this Legion exploit, which would otherwise have remained unrecorded for ever, is here told by a man who is not only a good soldier, but a poet and an artist. Although he attempts no fine writing, very much of his writing is fine ; economically-worded prose-poems of description. Seeing with an artist's eye, he writes of a lonely village : "*A few scattered houses in a desert of snow and silence.*"

Again :

*"Spring began to appear, pale green leaves peeped from the old dark branches. Waterfalls, freed from their canopy of snow and ice, tumbled down to the stream. Only their song echoed in the woods ; no birds could be heard. This silence, this death of Nature, was one of the most extraordinary things we experienced in our progress across the mountains."*

And again :

*"And indeed the mountains about Narvik seemed to hover almost lovingly over our new headquarters. The ridges were very steep, like rocky bastions, and covered with trees—not only birches but often thick clumps of pines. Sometimes, in the afternoon, when the sun was strong, we caught the scent of resin. On a hot day, looking across toward the lower part of the Rombaken, deep blue between the pines and the grey rocks, we might have imagined ourselves in Provence. The mountain next to us reminded us of one of Cézanne's impressions of the district around Aix-en-Provence."*



## FOREWORD

Unusual entries in a field-service note-book !

The author's descriptions of *légionnaires* and their work is another exemplification of "*Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*," and though part of the change was from white linen tunic and trousers, with blue sash and curtain hanging from the *képi* to guard the neck from the sun—into very heavy woollies, ski-boots, khaki uniforms, fur jackets, white turn-over stockings, berets and capes—with skis and ice-axes added to their equipment, it was the same old Legion.

Said one to another, as they stood in a bitter cold wind on the Liverpool Quay, on April 30th, 1940 :

"My last April 30th was a bit different ! I was with my section in Upper Morocco, in the Hamada de la Dahura. We had such a terrific sandstorm that it brought down a flight of swallows in a heap."

A thumb-nail sketch of an officer of the Legion, Lieutenant Courant, gives further testimony to the fact that the Legion does not change :

"Courant, calling him every name under the sun, threw him out of the car, threw us all out, threw himself out, got a shovel, broke some wood up, collected a heap of moss, and put stones in position under the wheels. The Legion is expert at road-making. And Courant was an old stager, one of the first legionaries, a lieutenant at forty-five years of age, had passed through every non-commissioned rank, seen a few wars, been wounded and beleaguered, had endured days of thirst in the desert, and a hundred other things."

## FOREWORD

I have known many such, but few indeed who were rewarded with commissioned rank.

Of the man who commanded these magnificent professional soldiers the author writes :

*"He possessed an innate dignity which was enhanced by his decorations, by the scars of wounds, and his vigorous bearing. He had joined the Legion<sup>1</sup> before 1914, contrary to the wishes of his parents, who were opposed to a military career. Eventually he was allowed to go to St. Cyr, which he left to join the war of 1914. Wounded, disfigured, tattered, his unconquerable energy yet carried him through. Since then he had never ceased to 'faire le baroud,' crossing every desert from Syria to China. With his sharp-featured profile, his piercing eyes, and his skilful and dominating personality, he was indomitable."*

One wishes one had seen more of this commander of the men who live with hardship for a bed-fellow ; who greet Adversity with "*C'est la Légion !*" ; and Death with "*Vive la Mort !*" But one would have liked to have seen more of all of them ; more of the campaign that took them from the burning sands of the Desert to the ice and snows of Norway ; and more of their subsequent adventures.

The story is all too short.

*Vive la Légion !* May its story live for ever !

P. C. WREN.

<sup>1</sup> As a private soldier.

## INTRODUCTION

THE following pages consist of my memoirs of the expedition to Norway. I was attached to the 13th light demi-brigade of the Foreign Legion, charged with the task of making a record of operations. Every night I made notes of orders and their execution, of conferences, and of the most important observations and events.

We returned from Norway to France on June 13th. The Legion was supposed to proceed to France to fight : events ruled otherwise. Paris surrendered ; Pétain announced the armistice. Separated from the Legion, I came to England, where I lived for some time without being able to get in touch with it. I spent my first few days of exile in writing out my notes from memory. Later, coming across my Brigade almost intact at Aldershot, I recovered my diary and was thus able to check the accuracy of my notes from documents which had fortunately been preserved. These are the circumstances in which this book came to be written. You may enjoy it or you may not, but no one can say that it was not written under conditions that ensured the strictest accuracy.

I must remind the reader of the precise

## INTRODUCTION

period covered by the narrative. It opens on April 29th and closes on June 6th, 1940. It deals with the expedition to Norway or, to be more exact, with the latter part of the Norwegian Campaign, which took the form of an operation by land forces in conjunction with the Navy against the town of Narvik.

These points are important, because the public was told little of the combined operations in Scandinavia; moreover its attention was distracted by the greater drama of the Battles of Belgium and France. To the British people in particular the name of Narvik stands for a naval battle fought on April 9th, 1940. The fact is that there were three great battles of Narvik: one on April 9th, one on the 13th, both naval, and a land battle on May 28th, which resulted in the capture of the town. It is this last phase which I describe in this book.

One other point must be made clear: the position which these operations occupy chronologically in the course of events in Norway. Narvik marked both the beginning and the end of the campaign. Let us run over briefly what happened between the first naval battle of Narvik on April 9th, and the capture of Narvik in which the French Foreign Legion co-operated on May 28th.

On the evening of April 8th, 1940, the British and French governments announced to the world by wireless their decision to mine the

## INTRODUCTION

whole coast of Norway. This decision was made necessary by the illegal use which the Germans were making of Norwegian waters as a base for their operations against the Allies. It was a tardy measure, for the Germans had been using these waters for several days for the transport of troops. And in fact, on the morning of April 9th, a German communiqué announced that in order to ensure the neutrality of Denmark and Norway those countries had been invaded. Landings had been made on many parts of the coast of Norway.

The Supreme Council of the Allies met immediately, and pledged fullest aid to Norway. The Foreign Office communiqué, published on April 10th, stated frankly that a German invasion at many points had been planned long ago, well before the announcement of mine-laying by the Allies. Mr. Chamberlain, then Prime Minister, enlarged on the subject in his speech to the House of Commons on April 9th.

The next day, the first battle of Narvik was described in a brief Admiralty communiqué: "British destroyers attacked enemy forces in Narvik at dawn to-day and encountered strong opposition. H.M.S. *Hunter* was sunk and H.M.S. *Hardy* ran ashore. The remainder withdrew," etc. The Prime Minister's statement on the 10th was more explicit, and Mr. Churchill's on the 11th was even more detailed and picturesque. They demonstrated the magnificent and victor-

## INTRODUCTION

ious spirit of the British fleet amid snowstorms and icebergs. For the next few days the only communiqués were those of the Air Force and the Norwegian army. Then on April 15th it was learnt that the second battle of Narvik had taken place on the 13th, and that seven enemy destroyers had been sunk. The next day the Expeditionary Force announced landings at various points in Norway.

By April 19th, British troops had made contact with the Norwegian forces. On April 22nd, the War Office announced the arrival of French troops to co-operate with the British. It was on April 23rd that an official Norwegian military bulletin reported a preliminary land operation against Narvik; British troops who had landed at Bjessfjord and occupied Fagerness—that is, the lower part of the harbour—had attempted to capture the town. On the 24th an official announcement was made of the beginning of operations having as their object the capture of Trondhjem: "Operations in Norway are proceeding with Norwegian forces. In the south our troops in conjunction with the Norwegians are resisting the enemy pressure. North of Trondhjem our troops have been counter-attacked and a sharp engagement has ensued." Next day's communiqué again mentioned the Trondhjem Sector, and announced that an enemy attack had been repulsed.

On the 26th we received news of enemy

## INTRODUCTION

emplacements north of Stenkjer, and that south of Trondhjem the Allies had been forced to withdraw to the town of Lillehammer. Narvik was now no longer mentioned, except to say that there was nothing of importance to report. The fact was that the British had been unable to hold their own there after somewhat scattered attempts at landing.

The 27th saw a set-back in the region of Dombaas, in Southern Norway. On the 29th, the Allies repulsed enemy attacks in Gudbrandsdal. The name of Andalsnes was mentioned to show that the landings continued in spite of enemy action. On the other hand, the Germans announced, on May 1st, that Dombaas was in their hands and that as a result they were masters of the Oslo-Trondhjem line.

No further communiqués about land operations were issued till the Prime Minister announced in the House of Commons on May 2nd the abandonment of Trondhjem and the re-embarkation at Andalsnes. He drew the attention of the House to the tension which was growing in the Mediterranean, but declared that Norway was not to become a "sideshow." The communiqué added that there was nothing fresh to report from Namsos, which is the northern point of Trondhjem. On May 4th, however, the evacuation of Namsos was announced "in accordance with the general plan of withdrawal from the immediate neighbourhood of Trondhjem."



## INTRODUCTION

The King of Norway and the Norwegian Commander-in-Chief embarked on May 1st and 2nd for an unknown destination, later revealed as Tromsøe. The last phase of the Norwegian Campaign was due to begin, that of the land operations around Narvik, culminating in the capture of the town.

This *résumé* is based entirely on official communiqués and statements in the British Houses of Parliament. According to these, one may divide the Norwegian affair into three stages.

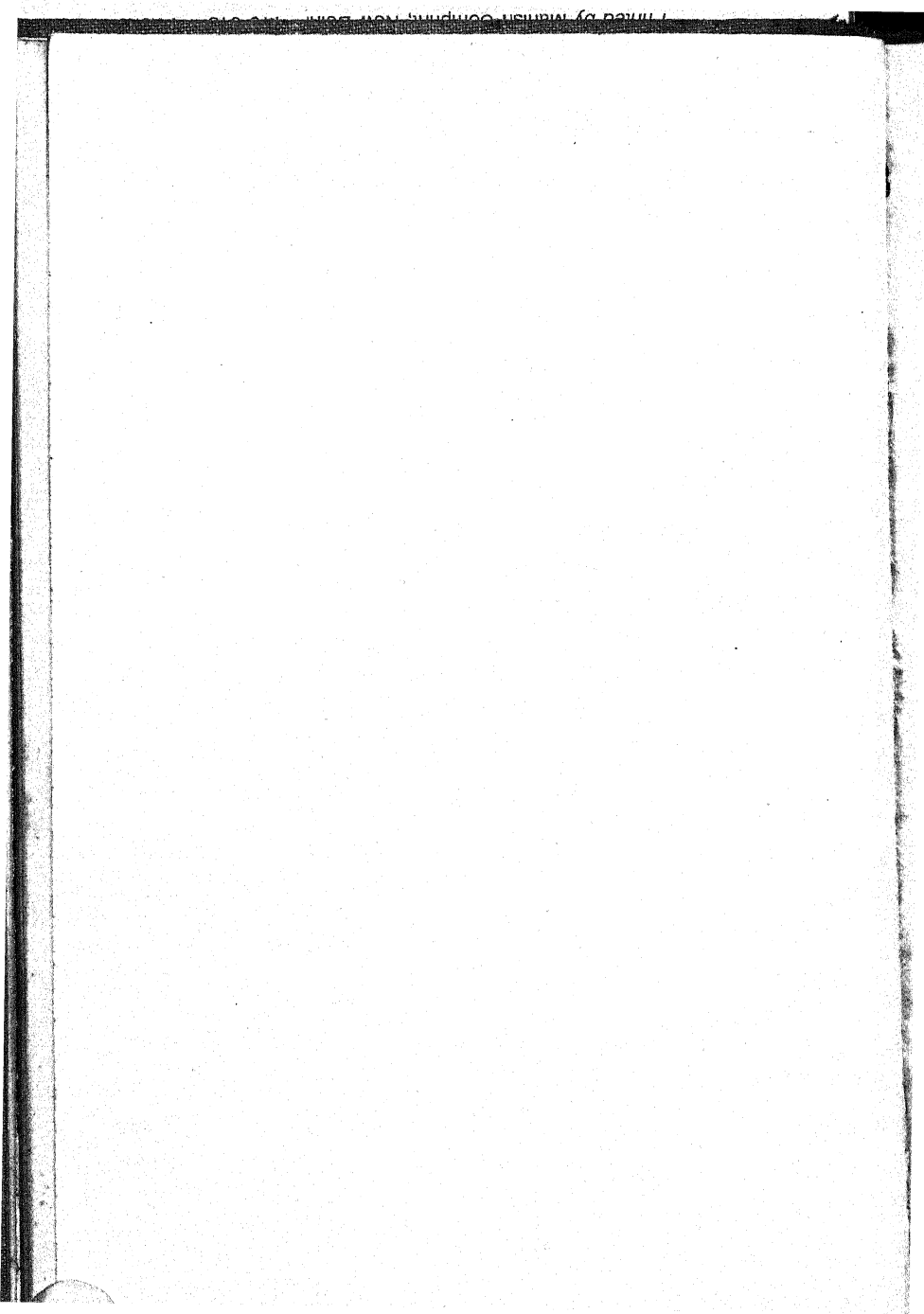
1. The immediate reply to the German invasion by aerial and naval attack. The two most important of these battles were those which took place in Narvik Fjord on April 9th and 13th, 1940, and resulted in the destruction of a large number of German ships and the naval mastery of the fjord.

2. The British landings (and later the French) at Namsos to the north of Trondhjem and at Andalsnes in the south seem to have had as their chief objective the capture of Trondhjem, a naval action having to be fought in the harbour itself. It was also essential, in co-operation with the Norwegians, to hold the railway leading to Oslo by the valley of the Gudbrand, of which one of the key positions was Dombaas. This phase ended with the retreat from Namsos and Andalsnes and the withdrawal from the Trondhjem sector.

3. The third phase consisted in holding a

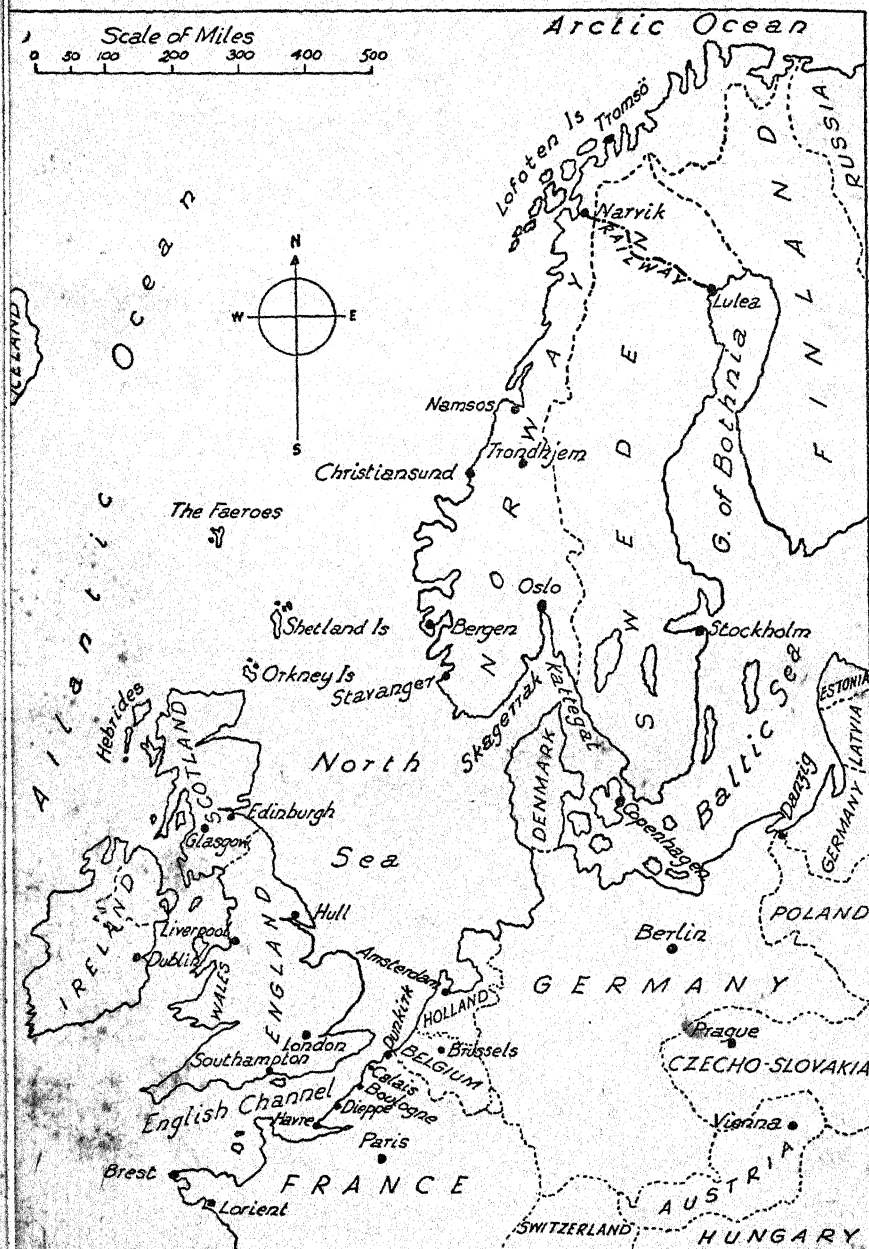


*The parade on the embarkation pier in France. The Foreign Legion band playing "Le Boudin"*  
*The Colonel of the Foreign Legion being presented with flowers when leaving France*



## INTRODUCTION

sector in the extreme north of Norway, known as the Narvik sector, fortifying it, obtaining complete control of the town and the railway, and driving the Germans south. This was the phase in which the Foreign Legion co-operated so successfully, and which is the subject of the following pages.



*General Map.*

## CHAPTER I

### FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

THE band of the Legion struck up "Le Boudin." The command "Attention!" rang out and the men formed a square on the Canada Pier. Although the view was obscured by a wooden palisade, beyond it could be heard the sound of the sea. Here and there rose the masts and funnels of ships; low clouds rolled overhead. The white scarf of the legionaries stood out vividly against the tarred palisade. In front of the red-brick custom-house a group of motor-cycle scouts in brown leather jackets with visorless helmets formed a dense barrier. Opposite stood a line of skiers in woollies and fur coats, their skis and ice-axes mingling in silhouette with the masts of the ships. The English General's car passed the bridge and slowed up. The Colonel of the Legion stepped forward at the head of a number of officers wearing red *bandeaux*. Two legionaries advanced from the centre of the square carrying an unmounted green-and-red flag.

A non-commissioned officer gave the English officer a British cavalry lance. The General

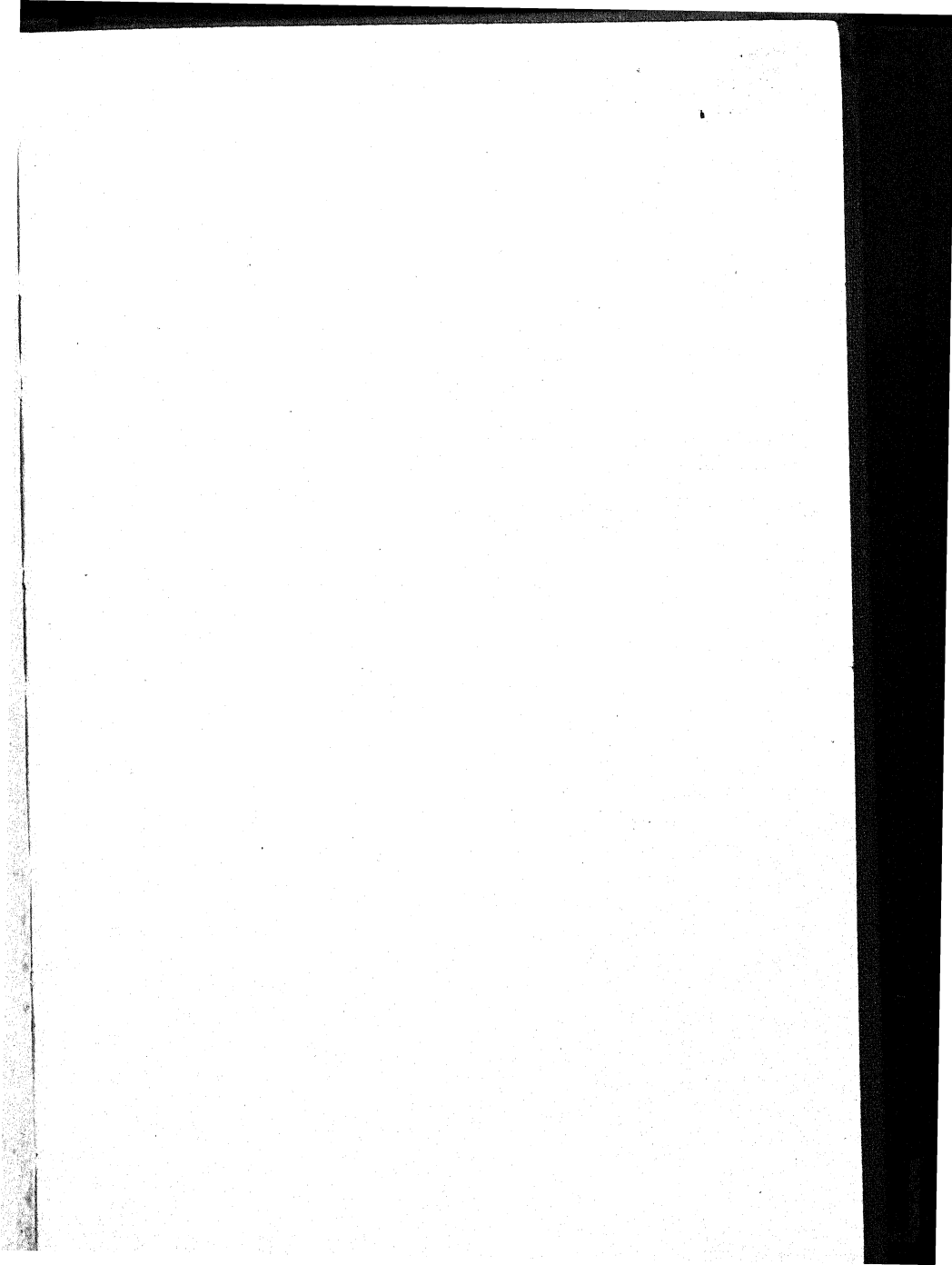
## FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

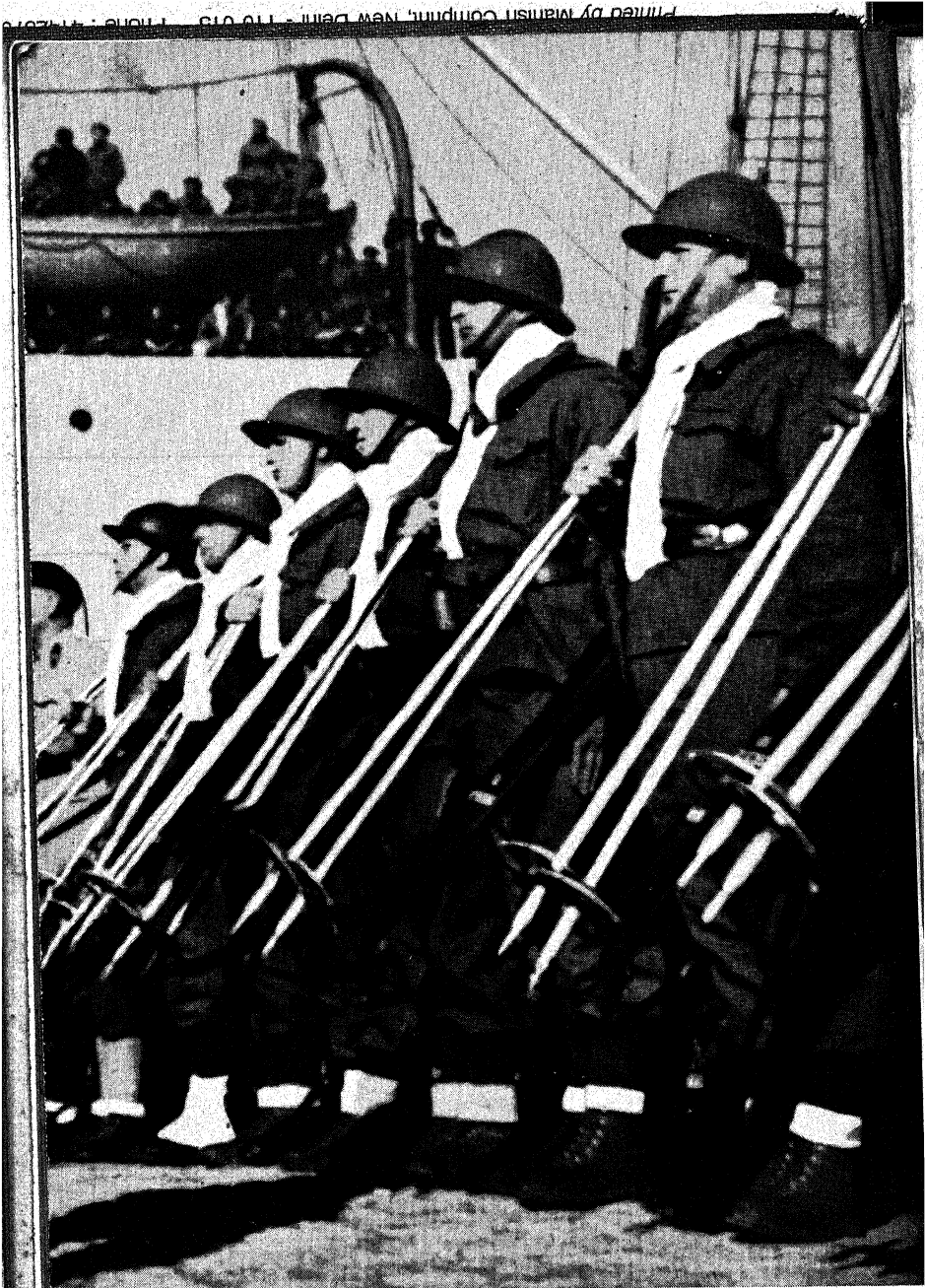
advanced to the middle of the square, handed the lance to the Colonel, received the flag from the hands of the legionaries and attached it to the handle. The green-and-red flag fluttered from the British lance. The command was given: "To the colours," and the honours were done. The troops marched past and again the band played the anthem of the Legion.<sup>1</sup>

This ceremony of Franco-British friendship took place at Liverpool on April 28th, 1940. An accident at sea had compelled a section of the Legion Brigade bound for Norway to remain at this port for a few days. The new ship *La Ville d'Alger* had just arrived and they were about to embark once more. The British military authorities sought a more permanent token of friendship to add to their fleeting expressions of goodwill. Since our flag had no staff—it had been presented by its Colonel to a very old regiment of horse—a cavalry lance seemed the very thing. But what trouble they had to get hold of that lance! Lieut. Russell, the hard-working aide-de-camp to Sir Robert Haining, who was then commanding in the West, had to telephone all over the place. Eventually the lance was found—just as we were about to depart. The moan of the sirens mingled with the last strains of the "Boudin," and they were getting ready to lift the gangways as the General

<sup>1</sup> The anthem of the Legion is called "Le Boudin," the first words being: "Tiens, voilà du boudin . . ." (Have a sausage).







*The ski-ing platoon of the Foreign Legion*

## WE SET SAIL FROM LIVERPOOL

stepped on to the ship to pay his last farewells. It was as if the guard on the quay could never be forgotten.

Evening was falling as we passed down the channel. Amid the hooting of the steamers, as their ship faded in the mist, the men of the Legion waved their berets to Liverpool and Birkenhead. They were sorry that those three unexpected days had come to an end, days of rest, of parties and games, and they fell to exchanging stories of their adventures in the black-out. The officers began to organize the watch. On the upper deck machine-guns poked their noses upwards, ready for chance aircraft. And night fell.

After stopping at Greenock to pick up the rest of the brigade, the ships steamed north. The sea was glorious. The hills of Scotland stood out in successive ranges, a light mist hanging over their crests, a deep dewy green spreading to the water's edge. On the evening of the 30th, at about 8 o'clock, a lonely island shaped like a sugar-loaf appeared to starboard, and this was our last sight of land. The twinkle of the light-houses faded. The weather was fine but rather sultry. Under a grey sky, faintly streaked with light, the grey ship moved. Over the grey sea, now and then reflecting pale moonlight from the tip of a wave, moved the ten other ships. Once again the Legion had come together.

On the after-deck the men were celebrating

FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

the anniversary of the battle of the Camerone. An account of this exploit of their predecessors is read to all legionaries once a year, on April 30th. On this day, in 1865, at the end of the campaign in Mexico, a unit of the Legion was despatched to an isolated farmhouse in the mountains, the Hacienda du Camerone, with orders to defend it to the last man. Their resistance enabled a convoy to pass, cover its withdrawal, and protect its rear. Out of sixty-five men, only seven survived, and they were wounded. Captain Danjou, who was commanding the unit, lost an arm. He had it replaced later by a silver one.

April 30th is the great festival of the Foreign Legion. It is celebrated everywhere, in every unit, whatever the circumstances of the time. At Sidi-bel-Abbes, the chief garrison of the Legion, Captain Danjou's silver arm, preserved faithfully in the museum, is exhibited to the public on that day, surrounded by a guard of honour. A military review is held. The men give themselves over to festivities and games, including a variety show put on by themselves. If they are on active service, they celebrate just the same.

As the men were filing off after the minute's silence Delamaze said to me : " My last April 30th was a bit different. I was with my section in Upper Morocco, in the Hamada de la Dahura. We had such a terrific sand-

## WE CELEBRATE THE CAMERONE

storm that it brought down a flight of swallows in a heap. But we celebrated the Camerone."

The fact is that the battle of the Camerone was typical of all the battles of the Legion : a distant country ; a dangerous expedition ; a withdrawal to be covered ; and men who have fought a desperate rearguard action perishing with the old cry on their lips, "*Vive la mort !*"

To celebrate this occasion our English friends had loaded the Legion with gifts. The Lord Mayor of Liverpool had given a gramophone, some ladies and various organizations had given books, cigarettes, and souvenirs of all kinds. The men squatted around the machine-guns at nightfall against sandbags (a protection from wind if not from bullets), and listened with delight to a record of Schubert's "Ave Maria," sung by Tino-Rossi. A huge hideously-coloured dog, a so-called St. Bernard, with great rolls of fat and red watery eyes, tried to make its way among the men, but was driven away. Officers, in pairs, made the round of the crowded bridge. The Colonel's orderly, Comus, was exercising his master's two white dogs on a lead. These had escaped, with difficulty, from the clutches of the Ministry of Agriculture at Liverpool, under the guise of *chiens de liaison*. At dinner, in a room atrociously resplendent with red lacquer and cut-glass, stewards who had signed on for service in the East, shivering in their

FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

linen uniforms, served up a mediocre meal. But the officers didn't care.

"Have you ever met a Deputy?" asked Captain de Lusançay.

"No."

"Well, I have, old chap. He kept me waiting two hours with my contingent, the dirty swine! And then sent word that he couldn't see me. What do you think of that?"

"I met one once, in Morocco. He was on a tour, and we got together for the evening. We had some fun, I can tell you!"

"What about you?" said Audier, turning to me. "Do you know any?"

"Yes," I replied. "I'm one myself!"

One might have expected such a reply to throw a damper on the conversation. But it had precisely the opposite effect. Captain Blanc choked in his glass, and the conversation turned abruptly to the subject of the champagne, which, it is true, was of excellent vintage.

At 9 o'clock we listened to the B.B.C. news bulletin, which one of us translated. We went to look at the map. A discussion began. What high hopes we held of this expedition to Norway! All these men, myself included, were volunteers. In forming the 13th demi-brigade of the Legion, seniority had to be taken into consideration. Every man had been serving in Algeria or Morocco, leading the same sort of life as in peace time. It was useless to talk to them of the



*Lazy days on the voyage*





## FIGHTING—THAT'S LIFE!

monotony of that dreary war in France, with its trench-digging, tent-pitching, fixing of barbed wire entanglements, guard duties, and the bitter cold of winter.

"At least," they would reply, "you have seen the Boches, you have heard the guns, you have been out in patrols; but for us, out there in the desert which we loved so well, it was intolerable to go on living as we did."

The hard life of an officer of the Legion seemed to them tame by comparison. Some of them had had no leave for two years. The majority had wives and children at Marrakesh. They spoke with fervour of the South, and now they spoke of the North with exultant hope. Fighting—that was life! Everything delighted them: their ski-boots, green snow-jackets, khaki uniforms and breeches, white turn-over stockings, bérêts, capes. It was a wrench for them to give up their accustomed Legion dress, but men can hardly set out for the Pole wearing white linen tunics, baggy trousers, blue waistbands, and képis with flapping puggarees. Norway was to them a great adventure. They had followed with avidity the first attack on Narvik on the 9th of April, and received their orders to depart with enthusiasm. They had left Brest singing, while the ship made her course past Recouvrance, had listened to the wireless giving accounts of landings at Trondhjem, Bergen, and Andalsnes. And how their hearts leapt when it was reported

## FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

that the British had made a lightning swoop along the valley leading to Oslo ! Their excitement was intense too when they came across some men at Liverpool who had been unable to land at Namsos and had returned, still showing the effects of snow and bombardment, and smelling of a boat in which mules had outstayed their welcome. " You wait and see what we can do," they said. " We'll give them a taste of what we did in Morocco."

" Wait a minute ! " I objected. " We don't know the first thing about this country, remember, not even where we're going ! "

" We're going to Narvik, of course," came the reply.

In fact, at this precise moment in our discussion, the higher command itself was debating whether to order us to continue operations. At the outset, the Legion demi-brigade was supposed to go to Trondhjem. It formed part of the French section of the Norwegian expedition which was to undertake landings at Namsos, north of Trondhjem, and at Andalsnes, in the south. These two landings were intended to facilitate the large-scale movement of the British fleet to obtain mastery of the fjord and the town of Trondhjem.

But for various reasons, some of which are unknown to this day, while others are open to discussion, Namsos, after a brilliant start, was abandoned. Andalsnes, which began with suc-

## WE DISCUSS OUR FUTURE

cess, ended in disaster. Finally, the tension in the Mediterranean caused the naval expedition against Trondhjem to be given up.

We may well ask ourselves whether the higher command did not now consider abandoning the whole Norwegian affair. At all events, the question of what to do with the troops at sea was freely debated in high places at this time. After due consideration, it was decided to send them to Narvik to occupy the town and establish a northern advance base which could later be used for various purposes.

But the French headquarters of General Audet, which should have been established at Namsos, returned to, or remained in, England, and the French troops which formed part of a convoy following after us landed in Great Britain and were sent back to France, as were those returning from Namsos.

We knew nothing of this as we discussed our future.

Parreau had been reading an English book about the Lapps and gave us the benefit of his conclusions at the end of eight hundred pages. The whole point seemed to be mosquitoes. But although the commissariat had made a note of mosquito-nets in the list of articles to be taken on board, these had not been supplied.

"Never mind," said the Colonel. "We can always write to our womenfolk. To think that I used to be ashamed to write and tell women

## FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

in France that I had a bath every morning in the pool at Ouarzazat !”

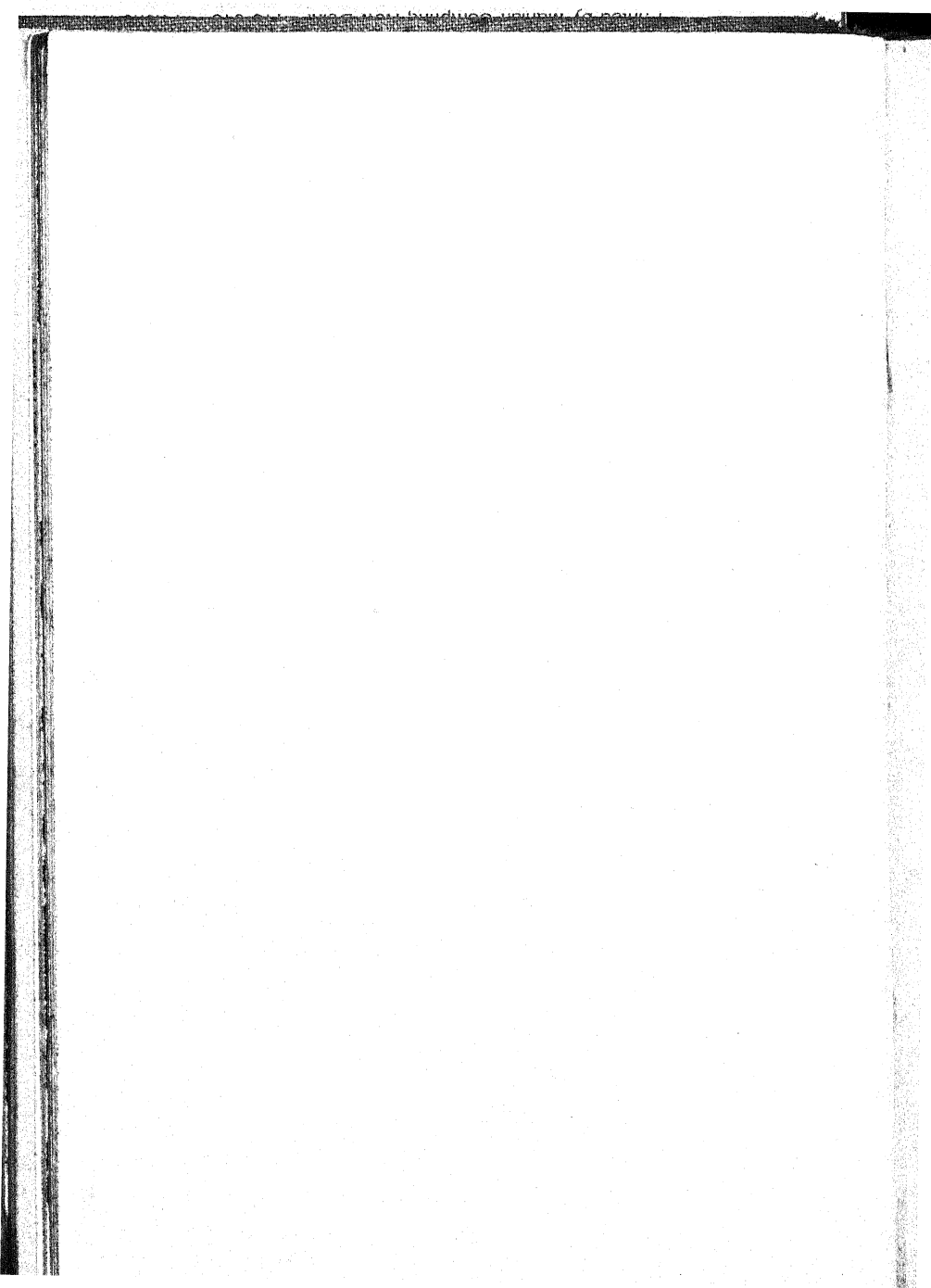
His speech was interrupted several times by hiccups. At Liverpool the Colonel had made the acquaintance of a charming young lady. He took her out in spite of the uncontrollable hiccups from which he was suffering. By contrast to this absurd defect, he possessed an innate dignity which was enhanced by his decorations, the scars of wounds, and a vigorous bearing which made hiccups seem almost the *sine qua non* of good breeding. He had joined the Legion before 1914, contrary to the wishes of his parents, who were opposed to a military career. On his return, the family remaining obdurate, he became a lighterman. Eventually he was allowed to go to St. Cyr, which he left to join the war of 1914. Wounded, disfigured, tattered, his unconquerable energy yet carried him through. Since then he had never ceased to *faire le baroud*, crossing every desert from Syria to China. With his sharp-featured profile, his piercing eyes, and his skilful and dominating personality, he was indomitable. But he suffered from hiccups ; and his complaint became a legend. The officer in charge of the log-book wrote : “ May 1st, 8 p.m. The Colonel still has hiccups. Sea calm.”

“ A poor sort of joke,” said the Colonel, when he read these words. “ You will be placed under arrest.”

Day presently crept up and overtook the night.



*British sailors and French soldiers enjoy the journey  
The mules seem to enjoy it also*



## WE SIGHT THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

The voyage passed without incident and the sea continued calm. Only an occasional sea-bird, a kind of small duck, would fly up alongside the ship, batter against the side, and settle again a little farther on. One afternoon, for practice with a new gun, the men were given these birds as a target. A legionary killed one, and it stained the water with such a vast patch of blood that we wondered how so much life could be contained in so tiny a body.

The convoy was split up into two parts. The ships flying the white eagle of Poland, with their torpedo-boats, left us for a destination farther north. We no longer heard the Polish choruses after supper float upwards from the stern, linger a moment over the waves, and die away—as we used to when the wind blew in our direction. We were bound, so we understood, for Narvik.

Towards the end of the day a dim mass became visible on the horizon : a ship, an iceberg, an island perhaps? Other shapes emerged in a row out of the sea. As the sun caught them in almost horizontal rays, they suddenly glowed white. They were the first icy sentinels of the Lofoten Islands. We turned in for the night, hoping we should be inside the fjord by the morning. No such luck ! During the night we had hove round ; in the morning we found ourselves facing the same scene as before : a sort of Thule, as it were : those islands hanging in a magic world, of which Pytheas speaks, wherein



## FROM LIVERPOOL TO THE LOFOTEN ISLANDS

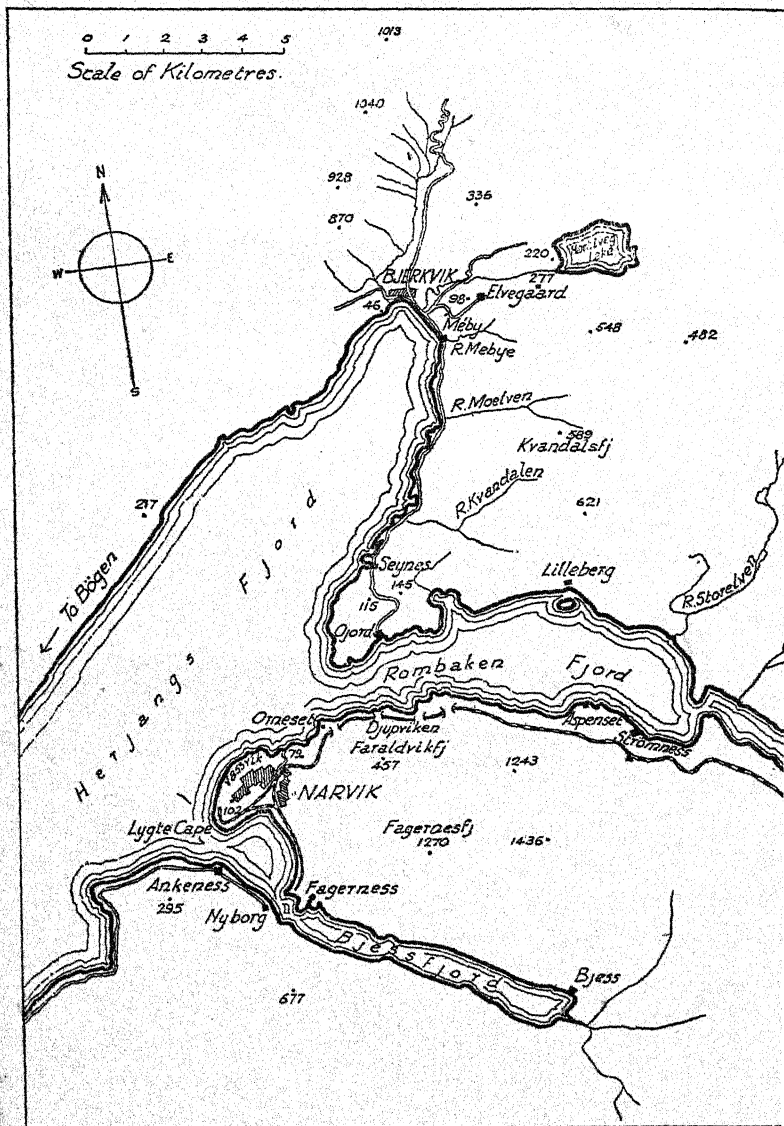
he set the transparent temple of the gods born of water and sun. They were now closer together and seemed to form a wall of frost on the horizon. Presently we passed through a gap and followed a long narrow passage through the snow. The convoy moved into line, the banks closed in and the snow stretched to the water's edge. Now and again we could make out an object a little less white than others—the lightly covered stem of a leafless birch. Elsewhere, scattered about haphazard, rose a house or a steeple—green, cream, ochre, black, red, or the natural varnished colour of ship's planks. Groups of people appeared occasionally and made signs to us. As the mountains drew closer, we were unable to tell whether the stretches of water between them were inlets of the sea, bays, or fjords. In this land of eternal winter, the very geography seemed to have taken its inspiration from the snow's caprices. Even the sky had become white.

Suddenly, round the bend, a number of ships came into view—warships, merchant ships, transports, fishing boats. These last came from every direction, the Norwegian flag flying at their masts, their motors spluttering. These big-bellied white boats had their engineers' cabins in the centre, and the dark chasm of their holds amidships. They came and went, turned, slowed down, formed groups, as if under superhuman control. From time to time a rowing boat

#### THE STAFF OFFICERS CONFER

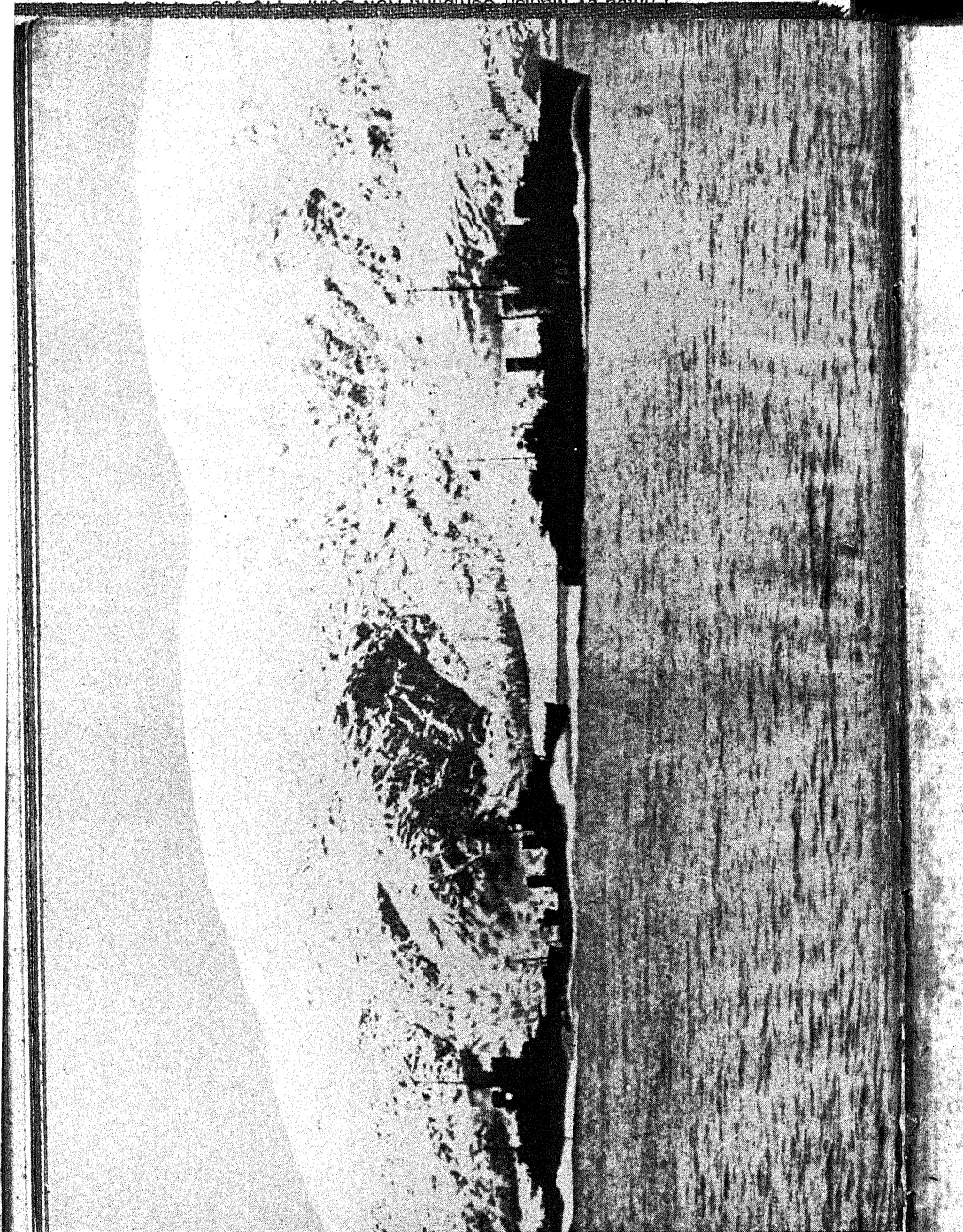
would put out from the shore, a young viking, fairer than the blonds of Flanders, plying the oars and making his boat, finely pointed like those of all aristocrats of the sea, leap like a greyhound.

The staff officers conferred. Maps were unfolded, orders were given. Our headquarters were at Harstadt, in the remotest of the Lofoten Islands, on the banks of a canal to the south of which we were now situated. Our anchorage was in Narvik Fjord, hidden from view by a curve in the mountains. It was our intention to establish a base at Ballangen, in a fjord to the south, and to encamp in the neighbourhood, by the sea, there to await orders for operations against Narvik. It would only take a few days to reassemble the two scattered battalions on two or three ships, collect the cars, lorries, and accoutrements, which had been ridiculously split up by the port authorities at Brest, attend to the mules (who were suffering slightly from sea-sickness), get the men in trim again after the compulsory relaxation of the voyage, and find out something about the strange land upon which we were about to set foot.



Narvik Fjord

  
To Sweden



*British destroyers at the entrance to Narvik Fjord*

## CHAPTER II

### THE CAMP AT SCARNESSE

COMMANDANT PARIS, chief staff-officer to General Béthouard, commander of the light division, swore profusely. For, after giving us our orders, he had discovered that the English ship which had brought him there had departed. He gave vent to a fearful flow of language, in which the English, the sailors, the fjords, the sea and the mountains got all mixed up together. The headquarters of the division were two hours distant by destroyer and five hours by ordinary boat. It was midnight. We could not get there before 5 o'clock.

"Once again we shall have to go without sleep."

"They never get any sleep in this country!"

All the officers we met appeared strung up and exhausted. The absence of night was one reason. The slowness and difficulty of communications was another. The Commandant, an excellent man, finally consented to go on one of the Norwegian fishing-boats—nicknamed by the English "puffers" (presumably on account of the noise they make). We packed into this vessel the most amazing assortment of officers,

## THE CAMP AT SCARNESS

men and luggage I have ever seen—including everything except mules. About 5 o'clock in the morning we came within sight of Harstadt. This town stands at the foot of a hollow. It is made entirely of wood, and might have come out of an old print. All the houses were varnished and placed side by side as if in a woodcut.

A number of cargo ships were anchored in port. A warship bristling with guns was there as a protection against air attack. A track in the snow showed signs of a recent bombardment. The British staff, stationed at the Grand Hotel, had seen their headquarters crash to the ground in ruins.

The reconciliation between Commandant Paris and the British took place on the quayside. Large tables had been placed for units whom we were relieving, and who were now about to depart. The English commissariat distributed cups of tea and huge cheese sandwiches.

"You men have let me down," said Commandant Paris, with military authority. "I'll take my revenge on your sandwiches."

"With pleasure," replied one of the officers, who knew no more French than the Commandant knew English. After a splendid meal we proceeded to headquarters, where we found everybody asleep. Who said that at headquarters they never sleep? We crowded ourselves into a vacant room in the house next door, and made the acquaintance of the peculiar



Norwegian beds which seem to be part boat, part cradle, part trough, and part chest-of-drawers. The only thing they lack is mattress and sheets, but they make up for this defect with enormous eiderdowns. They are ideal for tired people—which we were.

After a round of formal visits and conferences, I set out again for the port. It was 4 o'clock in the afternoon. I found a cargo-boat which was returning to Ballangen : on board—heaven knows why, for Harstadt was miles off their route—were two lieutenants of the Legion, some legionaries, three English soldiers suffering from wounds from machine-gun bullets, some Norwegian sailors with their skipper, a Russian cook, a motor-car, a quantity of celery and a dozen mules.

"I don't know where we're going," said Courant. "We've been on this boat all the morning ; we can't make ourselves understood. I've jawed away to them like hell, but it's no good. We were bombed just as we were changing over. The mules kicked up a frightful row, and then these idiots suddenly abandoned the *Ville d'Alger*, and now God knows what they're going to do with us !"

"You have a shot," said the other officer to me, a man of Dutch extraction, as quiet as Courant was impetuous. "Perhaps you'll have better luck."

Whether it was through my intervention, or



## THE CAMP AT SCARNES

whether it was because it happened to be his ultimate destination, the captain of the ship made us understand that he was going to Ballangen.

"At last!" cried the chorus of legionaries.

"But when shall we get there?"

The captain made a sign on his watch.

"At midnight?"

"Yes, yes!"

"But it's quite near according to the map!"

We knew nothing of the fjords and their intricacies. Fjord follows fjord in interminable succession. It is impossible to get any idea of place, time or direction. And so it was that, steaming steadily, the cargo-boat did not land us at Ballangen until 1 o'clock in the morning.

At first we had contented ourselves with looking at the scenery. But after a time the sight of an endless succession of mountains grew boring. About 8 o'clock we went in search of food. The Russian cook had nothing, but we managed to find some biscuits, a bottle of red wine and a sausage. We made the most of this meagre fare, then some of us went to bed. I stopped to chat a moment with Corporal Pichin. He was a young Parisian, slightly deformed but very strong, probably something of an acrobat, with a lop-sided face and a mischievous-looking nose.

"I'm going to stow your kit in the old bus, lieutenant. It'll be safe there. I know how to look after people's things. I'm not the

Commandant's chauffeur for nothing. Often he says to me, 'Pichin,' he says, 'you're a bloody fool, you'll never learn how to look after kit!' The fact is he's a prize muddler himself, and it's a good job he's got me. Still, what can you expect from a bloke like him? A baron, he is—from Luxemburg. He's got forty thousand bottles in his cellar, and between you and me, lieutenant, I'd like to take a look at 'em! You know what it's like in the Legion, lieutenant, I'm always getting in and out of scrapes. I joined because I got into a jam. . . ."

"Who hasn't?" I said.

For I felt in my heart that he was right: the sins of the gentleman's son are soon forgotten, but the poor man has to run away for his misdeeds. But Pichin gave me no time to think. This man, whom I hardly knew, to whom I had never spoken before, suddenly bared his soul to me, told me his life history, with all its romantic details and picturesque exaggerations. It was a colourful story on the whole, though it got a bit involved: all about his mother, his girl friend in Morocco, his early days in the Legion, and so on.

"That's enough for now," said Pichin. "I'm off to bed."

He went off and settled himself in the car, my kit serving him as a somewhat angular headrest. I went to bed in my corner of the Commandant's cabin, between two enlarged

## THE CAMP AT SCARNES

photographs of his father and mother, each about a yard square.

When I awoke we were at Ballangen. This is a smaller town than Harstadt, and consists of a few scattered houses in a desert of snow and silence. On a fragile wharf stood stacks of cases, barrels, casks, vegetables, cartridges, ammunition, officers' baggage, and the everlasting celery leaves which followed us all the way from Brest.

"The blithering idiots!" cried Courant, his eyes flashing like a tiger's. "This place is simply asking for an air raid! Just look at this wharf. It'll give way any minute! If the Boches see this, we're finished. And not a guard—not a single legionary!"

Nobody took any notice, for all his cursing. They began by disembarking the mules. Pichin woke up in his car and tried to put in a word.

"Now don't you start butting in, Pichin. You look after your bus."

Pichin's slender form could soon be discovered shifting tackle, and the Commandant's car was parked among the cases. After a while the guard arrived, in charge of a gigantic corporal, who boasted a boxer's nose and had been to Hollywood. The wharf was cleared, and at about 2 o'clock in the morning we went to look for the Colonel's headquarters.

The roads were covered with snow. I say roads: in reality there was only one—which was lucky, for if there had been any turnings,

## OUR CAR GETS STUCK IN THE SNOW

we should have been even more hopelessly lost. It was difficult to tell from the distances between the houses where the village began and where it left off. It was even more difficult to tell one village from another, for there were no mile-stones, no sign-posts, no indications of any kind. Still, considering that the sentries were more or less asleep, and even when we woke them did not know where they were, we progressed well enough. We had no map. But we had been told it was about ten miles.

We had certainly exceeded that distance, and skidded for the hundredth time after passing over a stream rushing down to the sea, when Pichin, by an unlucky tug at the wheel, plunged the car into a side-track thick with soft snow. Courant, calling him every name under the sun, threw him out of the car, threw us all out, threw himself out, got a shovel, broke some wood up, collected a heap of moss, and put stones in position under the wheels. The Legion is expert at road-making. And Courant was an old stager, one of the first legionaries, a lieutenant at 45 years of age, had passed through every non-commissioned rank, seen a few wars, been wounded and beleaguered, had endured days of thirst in the desert, and a hundred other things. Yet all his skill melted in the snow.

"We need a horse," he muttered, "and some rope."

So we sent our young veterinary surgeon,

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## THE CAMP AT SCARNESS

whom we had picked up at Ballangen, to inquire at a house half-way up the hill.

"*Sacré vété !*" said Courant. "I'll bet you he makes a date with some Norwegian girl. I know the blighter—he thinks more of women than he does of his mules."

This time, however, he was not guilty of desertion. For the house was empty.

"Let's try somewhere else."

We crossed the snow and set to work. We knocked at a house with a barn adjoining. A head appeared at an upper window and a man came slowly downstairs, followed by another. They spoke to us in Norwegian. But how on earth were we to ask for a horse to salvage a broken-down car?

They asked us in. Everything was of white wood. They gave us milk. Feeling rather foolish, I drew a picture of a car and a galloping horse on a corner of the table. They understood at once. The conversation ended with long-drawn-out stories in Norwegian. A woman came downstairs. We drank more milk. Presently there emerged from the stable a magnificent cream-coloured horse, with clear blue eyes and long lashes. The peasant harnessed him lightly. We returned to the car. Pichin started her up. The horse was frightened, and his master urged him on with soft "Brrrs." At last we were all set to move on again. All that now remained was to find out where we were

## THE COLONEL'S HEADQUARTERS

and where we wanted to go. As we pronounced Scarness with a French accent, the peasant failed to understand us, in spite of all our efforts to get it right. Eventually we discovered that we had already driven miles beyond the place. We took to the road again, in the direction from which we had come, and finally reached the Colonel's headquarters.

These were at a pleasant house overlooking the sea. The Colonel lived in a sort of combined sitting-room and kitchen, where the three daughters of the house, wearing grey flannel trousers, flitted constantly round about the stove. Once, to please them, a legionary worked, with considerable skill, a butter-making machine which made a terrible noise. The officers were just arriving from another house, where they had slept without ceremony on the floor, worn out by their march in the snow through unknown country. The fjord stretched quietly into the distance, and cows lowed in an adjacent stable.

The camp was divided between three villages : Scarness in the centre, at the head of the peninsula of Ballangen ; Bo, on the Ballangen road, where the first battalion was stationed ; and Tilboten, where the second battalion was, a little farther on, near the place where our breakdown had occurred.

It was the 7th of May. The snow was just beginning to melt. The roads, which were poorly laid, turned to slush. Behind us, over

## THE CAMP AT SCARNES

the mountain, which rose sharply, in 300-foot stages, to over 2,500 feet, hung a snowy mist. We looked in vain for a mayor, a schoolmaster, a priest, a gamekeeper, or a person with any sort of authority. It was the same at Ballangen. In this country, where the only communication is by fjord, and where most people have plenty of time to spare, rapid communications and brisk commands are looked upon with wonder. It was useless to try to get the inhabitants to repair the roads, though there were plenty of young people in the villages. And before anyone in authority could be found to issue instructions, the legionaries had swept the snow away, dug trenches, set up *fascines*, strengthened the foundations of the roads, and rendered usable seemingly impossible tracks. Three days later we left, ostensibly for forty-eight hours. We never returned.

I retain happy memories of those few days at Scarness. The inhabitants were most friendly. We invited the whole village to the officers' mess one day. The English, Norwegian, Polish, and French officers who came there for orders were amazed at this officers' mess, where the stove was in the middle of the room, the Colonel trod the floor as if he were in the Palace of Versailles, and the girls from H.Q., with their father, their mother, and their next-door neighbour, all crowded together. It soon became necessary to lay two tables for them all, then two rows of

tables, with room for the man who drove the car, a man who had mended something or other, a man who caught the fish, a woman who knew three words of English, and another who could sing.

It was here, one afternoon, that the Colonel demanded some fish that he had ordered.

"There's none left, I'm afraid, Colonel," said the cook heroically, whose nickname was Manche de Pelle.

"What, you scoundrel—none left! My own fish, that I bought myself! What the devil do you mean?" Suddenly the Colonel caught a whiff and a glimpse of a fish in a frying-pan. With a vigorous kick he sent pan and fish flying to the ceiling. I rather gather that the backside of Manche de Pelle followed in the same direction.

The invitation-list was finally reduced to two ladies, one for each side of the Colonel! All males and all friends and relations were rigorously excluded. This solution might have had unfortunate results for us, had we not left the next day.

On the 10th of May we had carried out a reconnaissance on board a Polish destroyer. The command envisaged an action preparatory to operations against Narvik. The position was as follows.

The town of Narvik is situated at the eastern end of Narvik Fjord, on a rocky promontory between two smaller fjords, those of Rombaken



#### THE CAMP AT SCARNESS

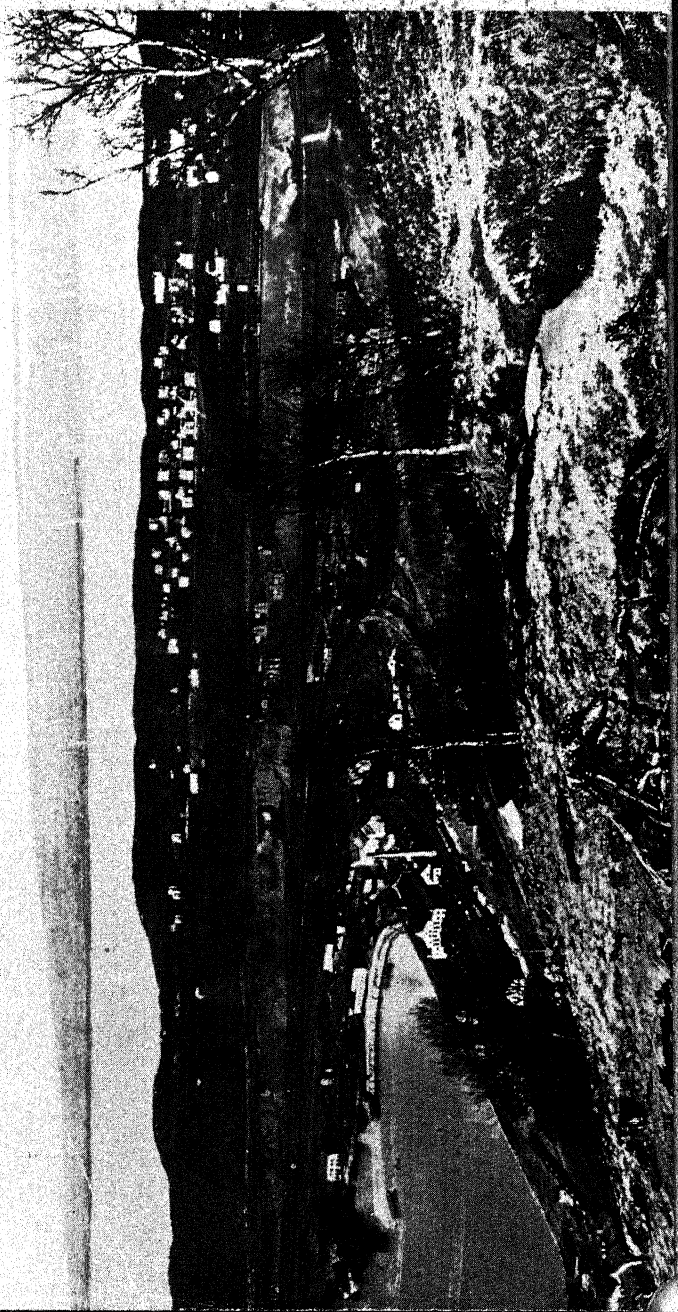
and Bjessfjord. North of Rombaken is the peninsula of Ojord. North of Ojord a brigade of *chasseurs alpins* and some Norwegian battalions were snowbound and held up by the Germans in their advance southwards. South of Bjessfjord at Ankeness a small British force had made little progress. Before any move against Narvik could be attempted, the Ojord peninsula in the north had to be cleared of the Germans and the Ankeness peninsula in the south occupied by strong forces. After these preliminary operations, an attack on Narvik itself could be delivered by land forces, an action which the Navy alone would be unable to carry out.

During our reconnaissance we took our first good look at Narvik. Viewed from the front, at the head of its fjord, between Rombaken Fjord and Bjessfjord, little of the town was visible. A range of hills about 300 feet high completely encircled the promontory. But at one point there was a kind of gap sloping from north to south, through which could be seen

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*Panoramic view of Narvik Harbour. The view is taken from the slope of a mountain east of the harbour, a few months before April.*

*At the extreme left, Fagerness. Across the fjord, left, the small town of Ankeness. At the right, Narvik Harbour. On the extreme right, first houses of Narvik. The town itself is not seen. It would be on the extreme right of the photograph. The ships were sunk during the battles of the 9th and 13th of April, 1940. The Poles attacked Ankeness on the 28th. The Foreign Legion launched its attack on the extreme right of the town.*





## WE PREPARE FOR OUR FIRST BATTLE

the houses of Narvik, the railway (which skirted the Rombaken), and the harbour (opening on to the Bjessfjord). Behind the town the mountain rose steeply to a peak 3,800 feet high. From this description one can understand how it was that while the Navy was able to destroy a great number of German ships in the harbour on April 9th, it could do nothing to prevent the occupation of the town itself. The hills formed a screen against the powerful but restricted fire of the naval batteries. The latter, however, took their revenge by destroying, day by day, every remaining part of the harbour and the railway line, particularly the tunnels.

On reaching the mouth of the Rombaken, the destroyer turned north-east into Herangs Fjord, which follows the western edge of the Ojord peninsula. This was the area which we were planning to invade. According to our information, it was strongly held. At the end of the fjord lay the village of Bjerkvik, enclosed by lofty mountains, behind which the brigade of *chasseurs* was held up. Half-way up the fjord, beyond Meby, Elvegaard, a Norwegian encampment on a plateau, had been occupied by the Germans. It, too, nestled among the mountains, and had the advantage of the natural protection which this rocky country provides against encroachments of the sea.

We now began to make preparations for our first battle. We discussed landing places and

## THE CAMP AT SCARNES

bent over maps, trying to imagine from the sea the nature of this unknown country which was so difficult to make out under the snow. Suddenly the wireless from Tromsø, the only station we could get, announced the German invasion of Holland and Belgium. The big noise had started in France. The Norwegian Campaign, which had occupied the centre of the stage, would now fade into the background—a mere episode in the larger war. The men who had rushed to join it voluntarily, who had appeared daring, even foolhardy, to the wretched fellows in the trenches, would now be looked upon almost as shirkers.

“A lot of kids,” declared Courant, “in a tin-pot war—that’s what we are! It makes me sick! All the same, the Germans are bloody swines.”

It was a personal affair between Courant and Hitler, though every one of us felt that we had been played a dirty trick by the Nazis. None of us, of course, realized then what the invasion of Belgium and France would lead to. Not even the severest critic of details of organization, of the myth of defensive warfare, or of the official conception of warfare, such as the Colonel himself, could have dreamed of the disaster that was to follow. We imagined immense armies confronting each other, locked in a breathless and unending struggle, while we carried on our miniature war.

"LA LÉGION, C'EST LE DÉTACHEMENT"

"Well, it can't be helped," said the Colonel. "We've got to learn to detach ourselves completely—even from the glamour of glory. That's our job. Fighting, even if you get nothing out of it. Still, I must say this Norwegian business is something of a strain on one's detachment."

These words take on an added significance when it is remembered that throughout the Narvik affair, indeed throughout the whole of the latter part of the Norwegian Campaign, men suffered, were wounded, died, not knowing but assuming, rightly, that it was all in vain. Rarely, I believe, in the annals of military history, has any action been so free from self-interest.

As the Colonel said: "*La Légion, c'est le détachement.*"

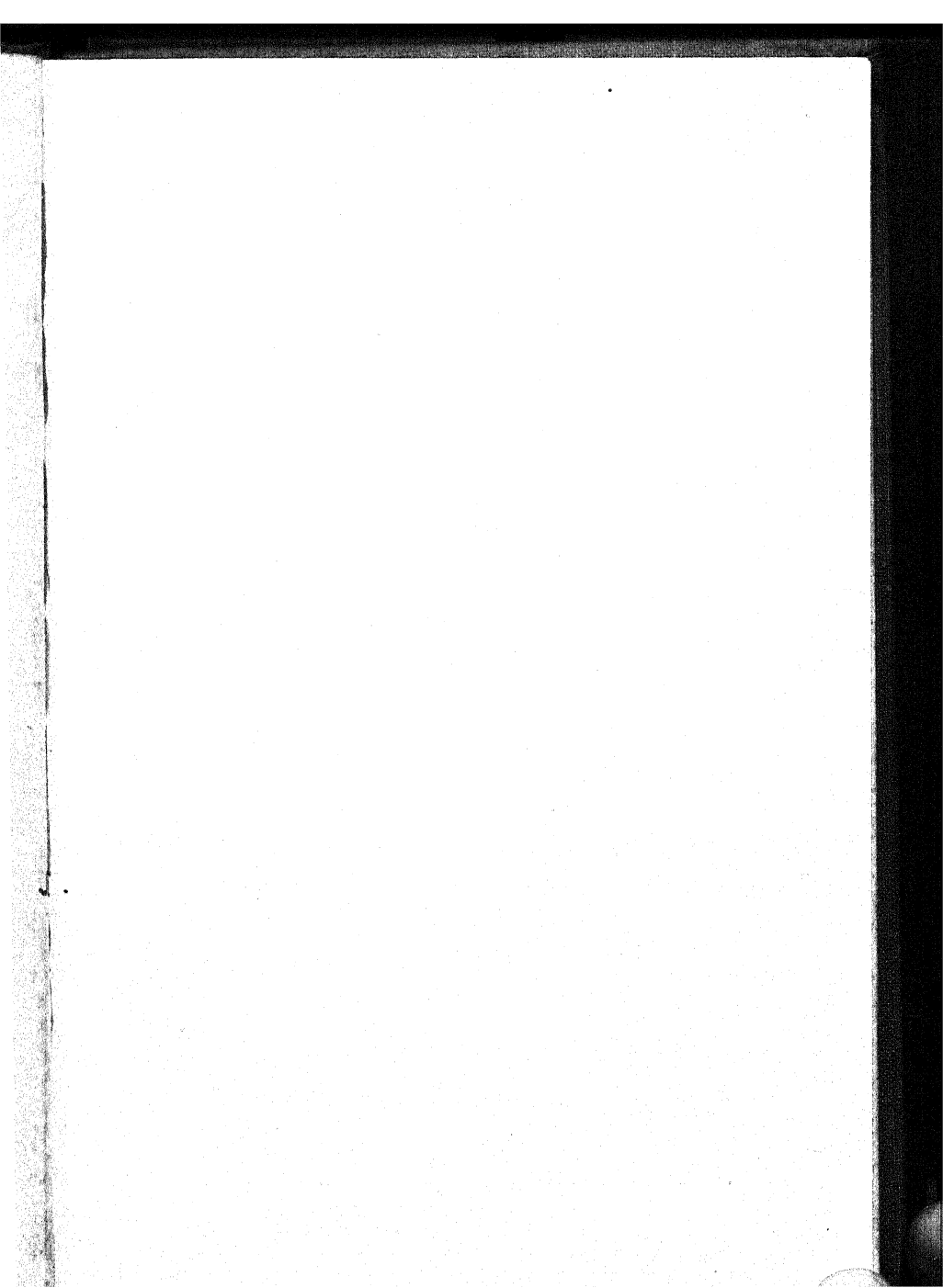
### CHAPTER III

## THE FIRST BATTLE—CAPTURE OF BJERKVIK

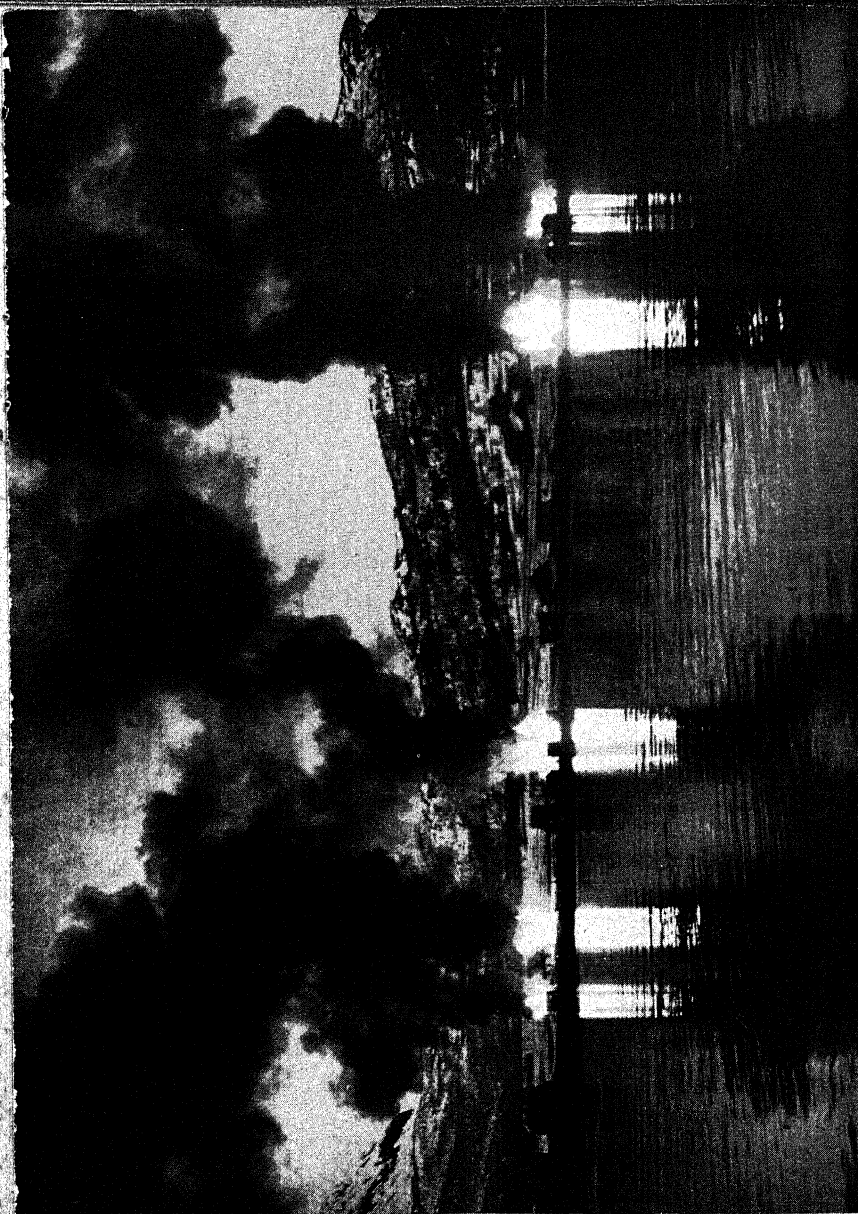
(May 13th, 1940)

TUNBRIDGE was an unemotional English boy, very young, very spruce, with his béret stuck on his head at an impressive angle, and looking so much like every other unemotional English boy in His Majesty's Navy, that the Colonel, to whom he had been detailed, tied a white ribbon round his arm to distinguish him.

Tunbridge mounted guard before the cabin of the commander of the *Vindictive*. We had dined there, and the Colonel was resting. Opposite Tunbridge an elderly legionary also kept watch. They made a curious contrast, the old legionary standing armed in front of his colonel's door, and the 15-year-old Tunbridge, bare-necked, blue-eyed, in a sort of sentry-box, trying not to fall asleep against the fire-hose. The passages were full of sacks, rifles, and sleeping legionaries. The officers had had some drinks and were dozing in armchairs in the wardroom. The Colonel was asleep on the Commandant's bed.







*The burning village of Bjerkvik at the head of Herjangs Fjord*

*This photograph was taken from the point on the bridge of a battleship where the author was at 12.30 a.m. on the 13th of May, 1940*

## TIME FOR THE SHELLING TO BEGIN

At midnight Tunbridge looked in. "There's a lot of firing going on, sir."

It was, in fact, time for the shelling to begin. I awoke the Colonel. He shaved, had a bath, put on his decorations, picked out his best belt, and took up his stick. We then returned to the Commandant's bridge, preceded by Tunbridge and his ribbon.

An extraordinary sight greeted us. It reminded one of the cinema. "*30 mètres de bombardement, s'il vous plaît.*" In Herangs Fjord seven warships were anchored. They had been firing since exactly midnight. Facing us, a line of snowy mountains rose abruptly against a sky heavy with low clouds. At their foot lay the village of Bjerkvik. Some houses were on fire. A munition dump had blown up. Flames rose high into the sky. The mountains to the east did not appear to be so high, and immediately on our right about a mile away the scattered houses of Méby stood out. On one side, a fortified position, Hill 98, was plastered by the guns. In the distance stretched a plain beyond which appeared a wood and the buildings of the camp at Elvegaard.

The noise of the guns, the flames, the smoke spreading over the snow, the mountains falling to the sea, the mighty ships dominating the frozen countryside, the mysterious hour of midnight—all combined to make the scene unforgettable.

The arrival of the men created an even more

impressive spectacle. At the end of an hour's bombardment a sudden silence fell ; and then we saw that the sea, which was at high tide, was dotted with small boats full of men. The 1st Battalion was moving to the assault of Bjerkvik. Machine-guns rattled on sea and land. A boat made an attempt to land, but failed, and moved away to the left, towards the Bay of Haugen. Another boat, making for the wharf on the right, found it either mined or destroyed, and also went back in the direction of Haugen. The whole action of the first components of the 1st Battalion, which should have been frontal, was diverted towards the left. The gigantic form of Boyer-Resses, commandant of the 1st Battalion, could be seen standing up in a boat, regardless of the bullets spattering the water. He bawled out his orders in a stentorian voice, himself almost like one of the elements surging up from the waters. The forces arriving by land captured Hill 146, bolted the way westwards towards Haugen, and re-formed under fire, facing their objective. This movement, taken up in three lines, required courage, presence of mind, a clear head, and a sense of discipline, which greatly impressed the officers and men on board the English ships. A tank came on to the beach, beat down all opposition from the houses, then turned about and helped the infantry to re-form. Presently a second tank appeared on the beach and made for the

## THE SECOND ATTACK IS LAUNCHED

road leading north. In the north, behind the mountain barrier, the sound of guns could be heard—the *chasseurs* and the Norwegians were attacking at the same time as ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

While this attack by the 1st Battalion was being directed due north, another attack was being carried out in an easterly direction. The light was now growing clearer, and one could make out objects on the shore. The boats which had put out from the *Vindictive* were well set for Meby, when they came under fire from powerful defence batteries on the shore. The flagship *Effingham*, which was closer in than ourselves, opened fire on the enemy, ordered the boats to come round behind her, then directed them farther south. This unit, too, was obliged to change its tactics, but the nature of the country made it less dangerous for them than for the 1st Battalion. We saw the three companies moving in file, man by man, the first along the shore, the second through the woods, and the third over fields, reconnoitring,

<sup>1</sup> Landing of 1st Battalion at 1 o'clock, 1st Company, Captain Gelat, with C.A.B.1, Captain Guillemin, then 2nd Company, Captain de Guittaut, and 3rd Company, Captain Gilbert.

C.A. stands for *compagnie d'accompagnement* (machine-guns, mortars, and anti-tank guns, 25 mm.).

B1, B2 are the numbers of the Battalion. There is one C.A. to each Battalion.

C.A.B.1 stands for Machine-gun and Anti-tank Company for the 1st Battalion.

## THE FIRST BATTLE—CAPTURE OF BJERKVIK

leaping over obstacles, halting, advancing again, in successive waves.<sup>1</sup>

Two tanks, which had landed to support them, made themselves useful—they could be seen moving in all directions, frisking about like young puppies, firing all the time, in the midst of fields which here were free from snow. It was a murderous game. Captain Amilakwari, with his machine-guns, found himself ahead of the others, almost alone, facing Hill 98. He decided to attack it—and he took it. His hood was riddled with bullets. One of them grazed his throat as he was giving an order; he made a movement with his hand, as if to brush it off.

Now that the advance had progressed farther inland, the fight continued beyond our view. The battalion commanders now brought out their mortars, which were on board the *Havelock*. These, placed on the fore-deck and supported by sandbags, were intended to augment, from time to time, the limited fire of the naval guns and to break up any moving opposition. Up till now they had not been in use. Lieut. Peugeot, who was in charge of the mortar section, had some doubts as to the efficacy of their fire from such an unstable base. It might

<sup>1</sup> Landing of 2nd Battalion: at 3.30, 5th Company, Captain Puchoix, and C.A.B.2, Captain Amilakwari; at 3.52, 6th Company, Captain de Knorré, and 7th Company, Captain Kovaloff.

### THE COLONEL IS FURIOUS

have been worth trying, but for the moment we had to get them on land, which was no easy task.

Meanwhile, the Colonel stamped about on the bridge. "There you are, I told you so," he said. "A colonel is no use whatever. My men have gone, they've done their job well. But even if they'd done it badly, what could I do? I've practically no reserves: barely eighty ski-scouts. Besides, it makes me furious to be stuck here kicking my heels."

He was very anxious to go ashore, but had to wait for liaison to be made between the land forces and the higher command. Here, he was in communication with the Brigade—the General was on the *Effingham*, where the French flag had been hoisted—and with the land. But on land there was no direct link with the higher command. At the same time, we were well aware that our presence was a matter for concern to the Commander of the *Vindictive*. No bombing aircraft had followed us, it is true, but all these ships, wedged for hours inside the fjord, made a tempting target. It was now 9 o'clock in the morning.

General Béthouard, an officer of the *chasseurs*, quick and shrewd, wearing an elegant blue cape, came in person to release us and to make the liaison. It was now our turn to take a trip, which we did in an armed boat similar to those in which the men had gone across. The wind had freshened, and the sea was choppy. The

## THE FIRST BATTLE—CAPTURE OF BJERKVIK

boat had a flat bottom made of iron, and pitched abominably. General, Colonel, legionaries, *chasseurs*, English officers, and our first German prisoner, all huddled together and felt extremely ill.

We landed on the beach at Bjerkvik. Lusançay ran to meet us. He had gone on ahead to prepare the advance headquarters. He had hastened to clear the wharf of mines, was furious at not being at the head of a company, and was burning to do great deeds. Bubbling over with enthusiasm, with flashing eyes and teeth, he blessed his luck at being one of the first to set foot on conquered soil. I shall always think of him under these northern skies, prancing about the shore like a young horse.

"Who are those fellows over there?" demanded the Colonel. "Are they mad? In column of threes 400 yards from the enemy! And where the hell have they come from?"

From the west, from the direction of Bogen and Haugen, a long column of men, with a colonel in khaki, came marching, like a chorus in a revue. A motor-cycle set off to meet them. They were the Polish troops, who had landed at Bogen, and had marched 20 miles with machine-guns on their backs. Their flank, on the mountain-side, had been guarded by Norwegian skiers, which, to a certain extent, excused their close formation. In any case, they had met nobody.



### LEFORT SETS OUT ALONE

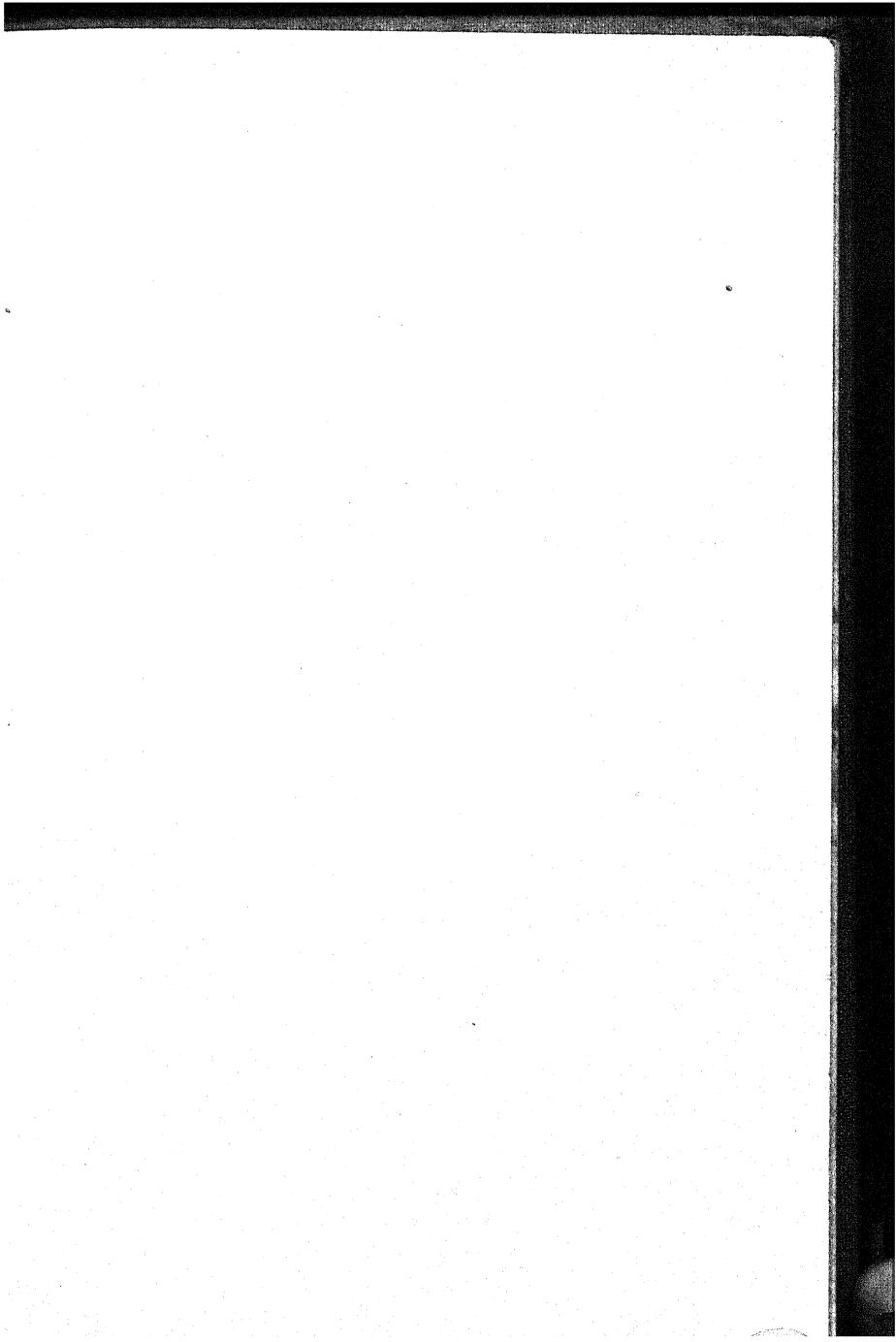
The news about the two battles was encouraging. They were making progress in the mountains—one group northwards, the other to the east. Caught in a pincers movement, the enemy had retired. There was no news of either the *chasseurs* or the Norwegians. The capture of the encampment at Elvegaard opened the Meby road towards Ojord. The Colonel decided to attempt a reconnaissance as far as the end of the peninsula. Lefort, wearing a leather helmet, leather scarf, and leather boots, went off at once with his motor-cyclists. The order had sent him nearly mad with delight. To set out alone in an unknown country, with the enemy probably on all sides, to be the first to catch sight of Narvik, this was indeed meat for a hardened warrior. We saw him winding along the track amid a great rumbling of engines. He stopped at the bridges, looking for mines, tested the planks, mended them, and went on. Machine-gunners were posted on the hill-tops, and the rest continued their journey. In spite of his daring, Lefort had not lost the habit of strict discipline acquired through years in the desert. At sea, a cruiser followed his every movement. About 5 o'clock in the evening, he came within sight of Narvik. His blue eyes glistened with delight, and characteristic wrinkles appeared on his face, giving an added force to his striking personality. He went down to the wharf at Seynes to make signals to the English destroyer.



#### THE FIRST BATTLE—CAPTURE OF BJERKVIK

He found that she was not the only boat in the offing. A few cables' lengths away a motor-launch was bringing General Béthouard ashore, his blue cape blowing victoriously in the wind.

Evening fell. Arms, booty, news arrived from all quarters. We learnt of the progress which had been made, step by step, sometimes over flat country, sometimes over hills, and how it had come to a halt before the first buttresses of the mountains. The maps gave only an approximate idea of the nature of the country. What appeared to be a smooth hillock turned out to be covered with rocks, yielding unlimited cover for the enemy. And anyone who expected to find precipitous mountains by the encampment at Elvegaard, found that, while the mountains were indeed there, they were separated from the encampment by a deep hollow which had first to be negotiated. Everywhere we came up against these problems of uneven ground. A lieutenant of the 1st Battalion stranded all night with his section at a bend in a pass was able by his tenacity to ensure a victorious resumption of the battle next day. The Spaniards recognized in these steep slopes something of the difficulties of their own sierras. They leapt from point to point like tigers, and never seemed to tire. Those officers who had had misgivings about welcoming Spanish republicans into the Legion (they dubbed them all communists) were grati-





*Signalling from the shore to the ships in the fjord  
Landing of British troops*

## PRISONERS ARE BROUGHT IN

fied to recognize their fighting prowess. One may instance the case of the young Spaniards who attacked a German machine-gun post behind Elvegaard. One of them was literally mown down by fire at only a few yards' distance. The other sprang forward, smashed the head of the gunner with his rifle-butt, and swung the muzzle of the gun into space.

We also learnt the names of the dead. Lieut. Maurin was the first to be killed in the field. Later the prisoners were brought in. Almost all of them had been taken in the encampment at Elvegaard, among them several doctors. The comradeship that exists between the medical services of different nationalities now became evident. Our head doctor never lost an opportunity of rendering the smallest service to his German colleagues. When one of them informed him that he had several operations to perform at the camp hospital, our doctor went with him, at night, on foot, and gave every assistance, though he had himself been working all day. The poor fellow got little return for his kindness—next day his first-aid post, over which he had placed a large red cross, was attacked from the air with such accuracy that the building was destroyed, the wounded were finished off, and Biancardi himself was so seriously injured that he had to be immediately evacuated on a hospital ship.

Mountain by mountain, valley by valley, the

## THE FIRST BATTLE—CAPTURE OF BJERKVIK

advance of the Legion continued. The Colonel could stand it no longer. Jumping into a side-car, he rode ahead of the ranks. He was honoured with a volley of rifle-fire and thoroughly enjoyed it. He sent some tanks over the same road (the north road) that the reconnaissance party, now returned, had taken. Behind the tanks advanced a section of Polish troops, commanded by an officer of the Legion (an Italian). The skiers set off along the steep mountain paths, many of which held unseen danger from avalanches. A tank struck a mine, leapt into the air, and was thrown off its course. The section hesitated a moment, then moved forward again. About 1 o'clock in the afternoon contact was made with the *chasseurs*, now freed from their snowy prison. They had suffered terribly. If they were unable to play any effective part in succeeding operations, it was due solely to this early misfortune. They had been despatched somewhat hastily in a direction where information had led them to believe the enemy had no large forces, and had found themselves caught by machine-gun fire, surrounded by mines, and trapped in the snow without adequate provisions. They could neither advance nor retire, and at that altitude were almost frozen. We saw some of them, who, with sublime fortitude, had refused to evacuate their position, and had to be carried away by their comrades. A splendid example of endurance, but a draining of energy

## WE CAPTURE TEN SEAPLANES

which did not permit them to be of much use for the coming offensive.

Presently we came in sight of the Norwegians who had come down from the north by the side of the *chasseurs*, but more to the east. This was in the neighbourhood of Lake Hartevig—a kind of fjord at an altitude of 600 feet, without communication to the sea. The lake was frozen, and ten seaplanes which had stuck in the ice fell into our hands.

Following Lefort's reconnaissance, the Polish Brigade had occupied the peninsula of Ojord. Thus the whole of the territory north of Rom-baken was in the hands of the Allies.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE H.Q. IN THE MOUNTAINS

WE thought it was time for a few hours' breathing space. I went with Duff, the English liaison officer, to the officers' mess to get some lunch. It was in a charming white house, where Manche de Pelle, now wearing a rabbit-skin cap, carried on his sinister operations. We were told bluntly that the Norwegian general was there, and that there was no room for us.

"Come with me," said Duff. "I've got some cheese and some bacon. I've also got eggs and tea. When we've got that down, we'll go off on our own and have a bathe in the sea."

It was extremely hot. We wore only shirt and trousers. Duff had torn his trousers in the fighting, and he had on a kind of loincloth made of sacking, tied to his ankles with string. Yet he managed to preserve his dignity.

While we were feasting off eggs and bacon, an air-raid warning drove us to the cellar. Finding it rather dull there, we passed the time by making an inventory of the place. There were some mysterious bottles of a reddish liquid which we did not dare to drink, and



some large jars of rhubarb jam of which we ate far too much. When the all-clear sounded, Duff remarked: "I hope we shall be able to have our swim now." So we went down to the beach.

"Wait for me," said Duff suddenly. "I'll be back in a minute."

I was beginning to know Duff. When he said "I'm off," he stayed where he was. When he said "I'll be back," he disappeared. He had come over with the Legion on the day we landed—just for one hour—to arrange the signalling system, and here he was still—with the signalling apparatus, the wireless and the whole flotilla of "puffers." Moreover, during the fight, instead of confining himself to the rat-tat-tat of the signals, he had taken a vigorous turn with a machine-gun.

So I took it that our swim was off, and made my way to the prisoners' camp for fatigue duty. I had scarcely begun to issue my orders when the purr of the 'planes sounded again. The men guarding the prisoners dispersed at an astonishing speed.

"Are they young legionaries?" I inquired of an officer, a Swiss of powerful build who was living next door to me.

"Yes," said Hauser. "But then they belong to the intellectuals."

This was the name given in the demi-brigade to a section of the Legion consisting of students,



chiefly from Central Europe—Poles, Rumanians, Czechoslovaks—all of them Jews. These poor lads had drifted from one country to another over a period of years, as their forefathers had done for centuries. Peugeot had a number of them in his engineers' section. They were excellent at study, application and calculation, but hopeless at drill, rifle drill, fatigue-duty and discipline, for they were always arguing. Like the Spaniards, however, they could be depended on when it came to actual fighting. "The intellectuals' gang," everyone called them.

Hauser led me and some of the "intellectuals" to a small trench, consisting of earth lightly dug up for a few yards and turned over on its edge. For about an hour and a half we remained stretched out there. Half-lying on Hauser, who shared my helmet, I was longing to see what was going on.

"Stay where you are, old chap," said Hauser, "and don't fidget."

A young "intellectual," whom I had often taken for a liaison runner, pressed against my legs, unable to keep himself from trembling. I drew Hauser's attention to the man's hand twitching against my knee.

"You can't do anything. "There are 'planes overhead. I went right through the last war and got wounded, and I'm still in the Legion. I've been in worse corners than this. But how I still hate the noise of those engines!"

## BOMBS FALL

No bombs had yet fallen. The anti-aircraft battery, which had arrived that morning, opened fire.

There was a whistling sound.

"Now we're for it!" Hauser cried. But nothing happened.

"It's only the signal," said a legionary. "It's always like that at first. A whistle for nothing."

"Don't talk about things you don't understand," said Hauser. At that moment a stick of bombs fell. We were covered with earth, splinters of wood and stones. We shut up all right.

"Speak to me, lieutenant, speak to me," whispered the young runner.

"I can see them," said Hauser, who was lying on his back. The branch of a tree hid the 'planes from me. I raised myself on one elbow. There were quite a lot of them. The raid went on for an hour and a half.

"Come on," I said to the runner. "We can't do anything to the swines. Let's get on with the prisoners' fatigue."

"You've brought me luck," he replied, and he showed me his helmet. The crown had been pierced by a bomb splinter.

The prisoners had remained crowded together in their hut, and luckily had missed it all. But the entire guard had dispersed, except for one man.

"Those blasted intellectuals!" said Hauser. "I've had about enough of them!"

Ambulances began to move on the road ; we heard that the wireless station and Dr. Warner's house had been hit, and that the parking place for the tractors and the Colonel's H.Q. were totally destroyed. It had become a hecatomb of officers, and among them was my friend François de Lusançay. Only the previous day we had sat in the officers' mess with our feet on the table, laughing at our comrades who had taken cover outside, and thinking what fun it was to be alone with the empty plates. "We're going to have double rations, Manche de Pelle ; fetch the wine." And now—nothing. The guillotine of death had fallen swiftly and suddenly after the first victory, after the first foothold had been gained on conquered soil. François had played his part.

The Norwegian general had escaped by a miracle. But Commandant Guéninchault, who had come to report on the 2nd Battalion, had been killed.

"If only he had taken cover!" said the chief adjutant.

The place was in rather a state. Against a rock half-way between the officers' mess and H.Q., two legs lay in a pool of blood : it was Salvador, one of the motor-cyclists. My orderly declared that I was lucky to have been out of doors, since every place where I might have been was destroyed—the Colonel's H.Q. as well as my own new quarters. I had just moved



*A Norwegian officer with French soldiers and sailors  
British soldiers and French sailors*



## THE HEADQUARTERS ARE DESTROYED

to a charming house decorated in pale blue. In my room was a carved table and a weaver's loom. From the window I could see, through the trees in the foreground, the roof of Duff's house, and beyond it the fjord and the sea. It was just such a room as Maeterlinck might have conjured up in his dreams, sweet and clean, and breathing an atmosphere of profound peace. A bomb had fallen in the garden. The walls were a mass of wreckage, the table had a leg blown off, and the weaver's loom was pitted with splinters. It was scarcely possible to cross the floor.

This raid had a marked effect on the men. Without waiting for orders, each one set about making a shelter for himself. It did not take them long to realize that those who had stood up had been wiped out, while those who had flung themselves down, even close to the blast, were unhurt. The officers were still more cautious. The Colonel decided not to remain in the house any longer. As for Manche de Pelle, he got another kick in the pants when he tried to open the Colonel's dressing-case with a knife he had just wiped on a woman's greasy apron (which was a sort of insignia of his trade).

During the following days a further redistribution of the troops took place. The *chasseurs* and the Legion moved down towards Ojord, and the Poles, embarking at Bjerkvik, went to relieve the English unit at Ankeness. Thus,

both banks of the fjords around Narvik were occupied by Allied forces. The embarkation of the Poles was carried out in an admirable manner—in fact, one scarcely realized what was happening. Marching in perfect order, they awaited their turn to the minute in the woods or in the crevices of the rocks, then, packed in the holds of the “puffers,” they steamed for Ankeness.

These troop movements, together with the bombing of Bjerkvik, forced us to shift the H.Q. of the Legion. On the way down to Ojord from Bjerkvik, past the cemetery, there is a small iron bridge, painted green, over a stream. Crossing the bridge and turning left, with the road leading to the camp at Elvegaard on our right, we took a track leading due east, towards the mountains on the Swedish frontier. This is a perfectly level valley, sandy at first and studded with deposits from the sea, then marshy and thick with shrubs. Suddenly my motor-cyclist shot along a path turning abruptly to the left. The stream which we had crossed at its mouth formed a bend here and widened. We entered woody country, and were presently climbing a winding mountain road. Leaving the motor-cycle, I plunged uphill through the trees. After a short time I reached a sort of plateau, hidden partly by trees and partly by rocks, where I found a forester's house. The view from here was magnificent. The trees in the foreground



## A NORWEGIAN COLONEL COMPLAINS

were covered with spring buds, and behind them, at the bottom of the valley, shone the green curve of the stream. Then came the woods, stretching to the fringe of the water and enhancing its beauty. Beyond, the cliffs could be seen dipping to the sea. Still farther away the fjord itself glistened, and right in the distance another line of mountains, capped with snow, hung in a limpid sky. No pen can depict the blend of colour and harmony of outline suffusing this landscape—the amber shades of the trees, the aquamarine waters of the stream, the pale blue of the cliffs, the lustre of the sea, and the half-dimmed glitter of the distant snow; the gradual shading of the boldness of the foreground into the more delicate lines of the distance. It needed a Leonardo to present to some Norwegian Mona Lisa a canvas worthy of such a picture. But there was no da Vinci there—nor, I may add, a Gioconda.

And yet we were to be accused of ill-treating the women! One fine morning, a Norwegian colonel, purple with rage—or with having rushed too quickly up the hill—came to complain bitterly of our lack of consideration for the people. To complicate things, he couldn't speak a word of French. So he and the Colonel of the Legion, being Allies, conversed in German!

"You must try to realize the position," said our Colonel. "The country has been occupied by the Germans for nearly two months. They



## THE H.Q. IN THE MOUNTAINS

captured the encampment at Elvegaard by treachery—they had secret agents in the neighbourhood. They were here, at this particular spot where we are talking now, for three days at the most. At the present moment they are actually in those mountains over there. The roads are crowded with civilians, on foot, on horseback, or on bicycles. They have no identity cards, no passports, no visas. They go to visit relatives at the end of the valley—so they say. You've got no local police, no municipal authorities, no mayor, no supervisor of any sort. And you expect me not to arrest civilians on the road ! It's a bit thick ! You saw yesterday's raid ? Every house in Bjerkvik occupied by officers was destroyed. At Seynes, the colonel of the *chasseurs*, the same day, had his house bombed and set on fire—the only one in the village that was hit. I had to change my H.Q. in the night. At nine o'clock this morning the whole of this side of the forest was sprayed with incendiaries (luckily they fell in the stream) ; that rock has been split in two : the track beyond the bridge has been wrecked. Your fellow-countrymen are very brave people, but they are surrounded by spies. We can't let them go about freely. You object to my making a sergeant go with a Norwegian officer to my H.Q. I've got to do it. How do I know if he's a genuine officer or not ? You can't go by his uniform. We know plenty of Germans

## WE QUESTION NORWEGIAN BOYS AND GIRLS

are going about in Norwegian uniforms. Some of them do it on purpose, to deceive us ; others have no choice, because they lost everything when their ships were sunk at Narvik on the 9th of April, and so dressed themselves in the uniforms they found at Elvegaard. Why, I stop people myself. I don't want any civilians, men or women, on the roads, still less in the woods. I want an evacuated area for my scene of operations, and I want some sort of police, civil or military. I have come all the way from Morocco to defend your country. I don't want to be let down by the enemy in your midst. See ? ”

This speech produced the right effect. Soon an important-looking person was parading up and down the quay at Bjerkvik, wearing a resplendent yellow armlet with the word “ Politi ” on it, and plans for the creation of evacuated areas were submitted to us. Later, the evacuees were taken away in army lorries.

As for the alleged cruelties, I knew what they were referring to. That morning, I and another lieutenant, with a few legionaries, had been on guard on the road leading to H.Q. We had stopped a hunchback, half a dozen young women, and about a dozen boys and girls. They were in the open, near a cottage which had been partly demolished, and we took them inside to question them. The legionaries took a dislike to the hunchback, but they let him

go back to the sea-shore under escort. The boys were searched thoroughly. Several of them were wearing army shirts, though none were soldiers. One of them seemed particularly bumptious.

"Why aren't you a soldier?" I asked him.

He looked me steadily in the eyes and replied with perfect candour: "If things get too bad, the Government will send for me."

The Norwegian legionary who interpreted this reply to me lifted his arms to heaven. Turning to the girls, we found them sitting on the ground, eating biscuits which they dipped in tomato soup. Two legionaries, contrary to my orders, were sharing this meal with them, under the envious eyes of the children. The search, for the women, consisted in turning out their handbags. We found love-letters, photographs of young people on skis, and all those delightful and harmless things that girls carry about with them. We told them to go home, which they did, quite undaunted, after their earlier fright, by our "*féroces soldats*."

The attack continued eastwards, in the direction of Sweden. The Norwegians now worked by our side. But behind the mountain barrier, near the frontier, was a line of partly frozen lakes and swamps covered with half-melted snow and spongy moss, where operations would prove exceedingly difficult. Little by little, every peak, every gorge, was overcome. The higher

## AN OFFICER ARRIVES FROM FRANCE

command, however, contemplated a direct attack against Narvik in the near future. While the troops were holding their positions, often under the greatest difficulties, conference after conference was taking place in the mountain H.Q. There were many visitors. They arrived at every hour of the day and night. The first of these was an officer dressed in pale blue, who had come direct from France to organize the commissariat. He had been a lawyer in a provincial town—Troyes, if my memory serves me rightly—and had landed at Bjerkevik from a small “puffer” in the face of aerial bombardment. He had found nothing but wrecked houses, mangled bodies, and bursting bombs. But these had not produced the slightest effect on him. As soon as he had discovered the Colonel’s whereabouts, he called on him, then looked around for a house. He found one complete with glasses, table-linen and plates, yet he came to lunch with us every day (we had none of these things), made his report, and returned well satisfied with Manche de Pelle’s cooking. He was an accomplished, methodical, clear-headed and brave officer.

It was quite otherwise with the *toubib*.<sup>1</sup> This man, coming to replace poor Biancardi, who had been wounded in his hospital, insisted, after our H.Q. had been shifted south, on moving his first-aid post to the north. This he did so

<sup>1</sup> Army doctor.

## THE H.Q. IN THE MOUNTAINS

effectually that we had\* to cover several miles before we could locate it, and then it took the cunning of a fox to nose it out. After attempting in vain to prove that the shortest route from one given point to another is a zig-zag, he would extricate himself by quoting a phrase about security, which he attributed to Péguy. The Colonel took him to task, and we got plenty of fun out of his literary quotations, which were always wrong, though he kept them in a notebook which he read over before taking his place at table. I should say he was quite an able surgeon, so long as he was not upset. In war, of course, the unexpected often happens and one is as frequently upset.

"It's always the way," said the Colonel. "You hope things will turn out as they are expected to. But in that case you might as well not go to war at all. It's the unexpected that we have to contend with. It's all a matter of intelligence. War calls for knowledge, for the experience which comes from accumulated and verified knowledge, also for a certain aptitude; the unexpected ought to quicken our intelligence, and danger ought to sharpen a leader's wits."

We spoke again of the "intellectuals." "What do you think of this?" said the Colonel. "I was having a hair-cut this morning, on that little slope by the waterfall. Weill had just set to work, when up above we heard an

ominous buzz of aeroplanes. Your precious intellectual immediately stopped work, leaving my hair half-cut, and rushed off, clippers in hand, to hide under a rock. I soon dragged him back—you can imagine how. And what do you think he said to me?—"It's collective security!"

One thing must be admitted—our men were not used to aeroplanes. "It's our own fault and the fault of standing orders," said Lefort. "We've told them so many times to lie down and take cover that we can't get them out of the way of it. They never think of observing the 'plane, or calculating its direction and speed. They just lie trembling." (Lefort, I must say, had a different attitude: every time danger threatened from the air he was delighted. Whenever a bomb whistled he cried, "This one's meant for us!" and laughed aloud.)

"I am not of the same opinion," said Commandant Cazeau, who was always perfectly calm, except when a touch of malaria gave him a temperature. "I think, in this general danger, every man feels that he himself is singled out—and that he has no immediate means of protection." (The fact remained, however, that the men who showed the greatest courage in hand-to-hand fighting were unable to face attack from the air.) "It was the same in the last war. An artillery barrage is louder and far more murderous than these few little eggs. But it

## THE H.Q. IN THE MOUNTAINS

has nothing like the same demoralizing effect. I'd like to know what's happening in France."

We had no news. The reports of the division were behindhand and very brief, the wireless at Tromsøe poor and inaccurate. All things considered, it was just as well.

One afternoon we saw a row of light lorries coming along the road from the valley.

"What the devil's this crowd?" demanded the Colonel. "More civilians, or a lot of soldiers crowded together without any attempt at camouflage, and simply shouting out to be bombed? Tell them to get to hell out of here!"

After a few moments the lorries disappeared as if by magic. As they drew away deeper into the woods and the branches closed over them, we heard the dying groan of their engines, then all was silent again.

Later the N.C.O. in charge arrived at the H.Q. in the mountains, covered in mud, a beard of several days' growth on his tanned face, which glistened with sweat beneath his helmet.

"Oh, it's you, is it, going about like God knows what! I suppose you think it's the 14th of July in Marrakesh and you're off to a *Bouzbir*!<sup>1</sup> We've been camouflaging ourselves, taking cover, and what not, till we've got thoroughly sick of it. And now you must advertise your arrival to the whole world by coming in that state!"

<sup>1</sup> Moorish for brothel.



SERGEANT VOLENT REPORTS

"I think," said Duff to me, "the poor devil's going to get the raspberry. We shall see."

The N.C.O., standing at attention all the time in spite of his exhaustion, discovered an interval when the Colonel was pausing for breath.

"Sergeant Volent, sir," he said, "N.C.O. in charge, sir—your tractors, sir——"

"My tractors? What are you talking about? There's no pontoon at Bjerkvik. There are no roads at Bogen. All the bridges are down."

"Yes, sir."

"Well?"

"When I got to Bjerkvik, sir, there were no cranes and no wharf to disembark the tractors. But I knew they had them at Bogen."

"I see. And how did you get here from Bogen?"

"Where there wasn't a road I made one, sir. And I made bridges."

"What with?"

"Trees, sir."

"How long did it take you to get here?"

"Three days, sir."

"Good," said the Colonel. "You are a legionary."

"Yes, sir."

We had one frequent visitor who used to arrive at the most unexpected hours, utter a few quick words, gulp down a cup of coffee, and depart. Between his white hood and his helmet were a pair of piercing eyes, made still

keener by the addition of shining spectacles, and a long-drawn face. He would suddenly appear, descending on us from a 'plane, leaping from a motor-cycle, sliding down from the rocks, or shooting along on his skis. This was Captain Faure, a *chasseur alpin*, bred in the mountains, trained in the school of war. He was unassuming about these qualifications, but exhibited their worth conspicuously. Though a staff officer, he was no mere desk man; he went in front of the men, made reconnaissances on his own, knew everything and was afraid of nothing. Since he came from the Division, his appearance meant changes, fresh orders, battles. So we were always pleased to see him.

Spring began to appear: pale green leaves peeped from the old dark branches. Waterfalls, freed from their canopy of snow and ice, tumbled down to the stream. Only their song echoed in the woods; no birds could yet be heard. This silence, this death of Nature, was one of the most extraordinary things we experienced in our progress across the mountains. Every morning, after shaving, we washed in the waterfall. Lieut. Morne, in an elegant pale-blue dressing-gown, attended by his orderly, even took a very brief shower-bath.

"You can't make a lather with this water," he would say, as though in apology. And he would proceed with his toilet as if he were at the Ritz.

## A DEAD LEGIONARY IS WASHED UP

Langlen brought off a feat which was rather more appreciated by the legionaries. In the middle of the stream, which at this point was about 300 feet wide, there was a small island, on which a dead man had been washed up. This was no doubt one of the men of the 5th Company who had been attacking that part of the encampment at Elvegaard which Puchois, his captain, called "The top of the bottom." We had been unable to identify him at roll-call, for in this country of bushes and rocks it was impossible even to find all our dead, let alone retrieve them and remove them to the cemetery at Bjerkvik. Every time we crossed the bridge the Colonel said, "You must get that man out of the way." Several attempts were made, but without success.

"The only thing is to make the prisoners do it," said Courant.

But Langlen said we could never allow a legionary to be carried away by prisoners. He went down to the water's edge. The bend suggested a fair depth along the bank, with a steep slope; but after that it seemed that it might be possible to reach a sort of narrow causeway; beyond that was a strong current. Langlen undressed and entered the water. It was bitterly cold from all the snow on the mountain. He waded in up to his shoulders. He made for the causeway, treading the bottom and striking out with his arms. Presently he

came to a bed of smooth pebbles, where the water reached only half-way up his legs. He had already given his orders to a corporal, who was adept at sport :

“ Fetch four Germans who can swim, and tell them what I want. But don't let them go into the water before me. And take care that they haven't been eating recently.”

These fellows were undressing on the beach. Langlen waited for them on his little island. He was thoroughly enjoying the physical experience. The dead legionary came from Grenoble : his name was on his identity-disk. He was lying on his belly, his head hanging over the water. To read the disk, Langlen, his lithe body shining in the sun, took the frozen hand in his own. But he was not thinking of death. He was thinking of bygone times, holidays, swimming-pools, games in the sea and the mountains. A Frenchman, he had had dreams, as a student, of German friendship ; he had worked for it ; he had gone mountaineering with young Germans, had bathed with them in the streams of the Black Forest and in the Bavarian lakes ; had lived with them in youth hostels, high in the mountains, like our own present H.Q. And now, young Germans were undressing by the shore, and were preparing to help him recover the body of a man they had killed.

Langlen ordered them, by signs and by word of mouth, to cross at a point higher up-stream

and not to go in right up to the shoulders, as he had done. There were four of them, about his own age, used to exercising their supple limbs in sport, and they welcomed this diversion after the dreary round of fatigue duties and work on the roads. Another moment, and they would have been playfully splashing water over one another.

They now had to decide whether to bring the legionary back the same way, against the current—and he was heavy in his canvas shroud—or tie a rope round him and let him float with the current. The corporal, who was a good swimmer, pointed out the direction of the current and the risk of being carried far out of one's way along the shore. They eventually got him back the same way, Lieut. Langlen going in front, stepping carefully over the stones. The legionary on guard at the bridge, after getting over his amazement at the sight of this icy dip, called to his chief, who brought some rum. The young Germans dressed and drank the rum with relish, all out of the same cup. Langlen's thoughts turned once more to the companions of his youth. He was not a man to cherish memories, as a rule; he lived for the present. He had no regrets about the war, and no qualms about shooting other young Germans the next day. But these fellows were alive—that was enough for the moment.

Langlen seldom shared his thoughts with

anyone. But now he could not shake them off, perhaps because they were memories—and, as I said, he was not used to memories. He turned to Loup, the wireless officer.

"This has given me an odd sort of feeling," he said. "It reminded me of a party on the Neckar."

"And you're a Frenchman?" asked Loup.

"Yes," said Langlen. "And you?"

"Me? I'm a German." (He stressed his *e*'s slightly; that was his only trace of accent.)

"I didn't know that. I beg your pardon."

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I'm about the only one here in Norway, except for that Count who was killed in the raid. They all know about it, but you've apparently only just arrived."

Loup, after the last war, had supported first one party, then another, hoping thereby to be able to rejoin the ranks and continue fighting.

"I see," said Langlen. "Spartacus?"

"No," answered Loup, "Ehrard."

And the two men on the mountain-side fell silent amid the streams and the rat-tat-tat of the wireless station, as they pondered on the past and the future of Germany.

## CHAPTER V

### OJORD

THE territory north of Narvik was now entirely cleared of the enemy. Operations in the mountains, to the east, came to a stand-still at the edge of the lakes and the marshes. Only one German position in the mountains on the Swedish frontier remained. It stretched as far as Rombaken Fjord, covered broadly the railway lines, and occupied the whole of the peninsula of Narvik. Southwards it touched Bjessfjord, and, at a few scattered points, the town of Ankeness itself. On the peninsula of Ankeness, however, the Polish brigade had obtained a foothold, establishing a base at Ballangen, in the south-west. Our approach by the fjord, our anchorage, the airfield on which we had been working, on the channel leading to Harstadt, and Harstadt itself, were all secured, by land and sea. Likewise Tromsø, farther north, where the Norwegian Government had set up its capital. In the south, on the other hand, in spite of the resistance of the British troops, the Germans were advancing towards Bodo. They also showed a marked superiority in the air. The only machines we had for



defence were those from aircraft-carriers, which were too heavy, and neither speedy nor easy to manipulate.

Nevertheless, our grip tightened on Narvik itself. In order to consolidate our positions alongside the Rombaken, opposite the Narvik railway, the command decided to extend our lines eastwards. It was intended to establish a base at the tiny harbour of Lilberg and to transport troops there, whence they could form a front along the fjord, towards the mouth of the Rombaken.

This operation was carried out simultaneously by land and sea. On land, over difficult rocky ground, at altitudes varying from 250 to 1,000 feet, Lieut. Geoffroy's ski-scouts (without their skis) were ordered to reconnoitre the country, clear it of its last remaining Germans, and advance downhill against Lilberg. By sea we planned to transport a body of *chasseurs alpins*, and, provided the reconnaissance proved satisfactory, land them, together with equipment and provisions. The plan succeeded in every detail. At the appointed hour the boats were ready, and we saw the legionaries file down the mountain paths, disperse, survey the houses one by one, turn out the occupants, question them, then make for the wharf to see if any mines had been laid and clear them away. Geoffroy gave us the agreed signal from the shore. Duff replied. The "puffers" approached and dis-

embarked the *chasseurs alpins*. We now realized how severely they must have suffered in the mountains. Some of them made desperate efforts to go forward, against the wishes of their officers, and were literally unable to move. With them landed a number of young Norwegian volunteers, who had offered their services as carriers. About a hundred of them, at the instigation of their Government, had presented themselves one morning at Bjerkvik. They were full of high spirits, always smiling, and game for anything. Unfortunately, we had forgotten to tell them that they would not receive soldiers' uniforms, and they turned up wearing clothes too light for mountain operations.

"We shall have to look after these chaps," said the Colonel. "You, there, you've only got a sweater, and no cape. And how do you think you're going to spend the night in the mountains? Interpret for me, Tano. Look at that fellow there wearing shoes! And they've got no haversacks! You'd better remind the *chasseurs* that these boys are not beasts of burden and they mustn't overload them."

The Norwegians made a dive for the cases and sacks and flung them out of the boats on to the wharf.

"What soldiers I could make of these fellows if I had them!" said the Colonel. "I'd make a company of the Legion out of them. Tano, ask them if they'd like to join the Legion."

But they had already run along the road with their burdens.

When coming ashore a sentry fired at the Colonel and missed him. "You'll have a glass of wine for performing your duty," said the Colonel, "and three days C.B. for missing your target."

He added : " It proves how useless it is to try to take aim. In war, aiming at a mark, teaching men to shoot as if they were at target-practice, is ridiculous. Pétain didn't like it because I wrote to him about it, but I know I'm right. It's all very well to rely on your rifle if you're firmly established in a trench, with support for your elbows, and you've got a man moving directly in front of you. But in a real battle how can you stop to take aim? All you get is masses of men swooping down on you from all directions. That's why your legionaries " (he no longer called them his) " ought to be ashamed of having missed me at so close a range."

The Germans were in summer-houses, high up in the mountains, and living from hand to mouth. After we had reviewed the position, we had to look for the new H.Q., which were established above Ojord, near a school, under Hill 145. The destroyer left us in the middle of the fjord. Duff took us aboard his "puffer."

But we had not come to the end of our troubles. Duff was entirely mistaken about the landing-

place. We were looking for Hill 145, but here there were no hills at all worthy of the name. Neither was there a school. There were not even any people. Here and there we met one or two legionaries, mostly armed sentries, but they had only arrived during the night and knew nothing whatever about the place. The Colonel was furious with Toto, the intelligence officer who accompanied us. Toto kept referring to the map, but among all these mountains how could one distinguish Hill 145 from Hill 115, or Hill 80 from Hill 175? However, we eventually reached our famous school.

“In full view of the enemy, of course!” said the Colonel. And indeed the mountains about Narvik seemed to hover almost lovingly over our new headquarters.

The country about Ojord was quite different from anything we had hitherto come across. The ridges, which I have already mentioned, were very steep, like rocky bastions, and covered with trees—not only birches but often thick clumps of pines. Sometimes, in the afternoon, when the sun was strong, we caught the scent of resin. There were mosquitoes about. They appeared to be the sole occupants of these deserted regions. On a hot day, looking across from the school towards the lower part of the Rombaken, deep blue between the pines and the grey rocks, we might have imagined ourselves in Provence. The mountain next to us reminded

us of one of Cézanne's impressions of the district around Aix-en-Provence.

But we hadn't time to stand admiring the scenery. Air-raid alarms were constantly forcing us to scatter. An A.-A. battery near by defended us ably and claimed to have brought down several 'planes. At the same time, the little base at Lilberg received a packet. Luckily for the inhabitants and for our men, the electricity works, which were close to the sea at the mouth of the water pipe-line, possessed an immense vault, providing safe shelter.

We too had our shelter. It was the place where we reported every morning and whence our orders were issued. But despite the gravity of the discussions that took place, this cavern, bristling with rocks and full of people arguing, resembled nothing so much as a cage at the Zoo. In fact, we called it the monkey-house.

Day and night our observers and officers kept watch on the opposite bank. We saw Narvik in profile : to the east the cluster of mountains receding by the side of the railway towards Sweden ; opposite us the rocky table-land known as Hill 457 stretching half-way up the side of a peak surmounted by a swastika flag, and sloping towards the Rombaken in heaps of small stones, with the last of a series of tunnels running under it ; westwards, the town itself, with its squares of wooden houses, red, black, and white, each in its garden, spread over the hills as far as the

## WE KEEP WATCH ON THE OPPOSITE BANK

sea, which we now commanded ; still farther westward, the fjord disappearing to the open sea ; in the distance, on the other side of the town of Bjessfjord, which was hidden in mist, the heights of Ankeness.

Each observation, by day or by night, yielded fresh details. No doubt the observers on the other side of the fjord were likewise studying our own movements. On several occasions destroyers making their daily round of the fjord were surprised by machine-gun fire. We could never discover the whereabouts of these guns. Probably they were mounted on trucks in the tunnels. The English gunners pounded the tunnels regularly, and were delighted when they saw smoke come out at the other end. Among the thickly grown woods and the rocks it was easy to take cover and to conceal both men and arms. Captain Paris de la Bollardi re, who had had the misfortune to be detailed to guard the luggage at Scarness, now arrived on the scene. As the sun went down, slanting across the Narvik shore and bringing the countryside into relief, we made an attempt to discover new formations and particularly to familiarize ourselves with the district. We found that rounded and almost vertical masses, according to the map, were plateaus ; walls of granite, which seemed quite close, were actually miles away. We came across footpaths ; but what we thought was a rock turned out to be a hut.



On our return we met the artillerymen. They were colonial gunners, and they wore an anchor over a red background. In a secluded spot on the hillside they kept a white cow, which one of them milked regularly.

"What will they be up to next?" demanded the Colonel. "People will start complaining of pillage now—they'll say my legionaries have stolen their cow—when it's you gunners who did it."

The gunners took this reproach very much to heart and offered the Colonel a quart of milk.

"Is it fit to drink?" he asked cautiously.

Not far away an officer, Schlinsky, was standing naked on the grass, while his orderly rubbed him up and down with snow.

"We haven't any water," he explained. "And it's very good for the skin."

"You're the gunner's observer," said the Colonel. "If your guns don't find their mark first time, it's because you gad about naked in the bushes instead of attending to your job."

I must in all truthfulness add that on the morning of the attack on Narvik the guns were positioned in perfect silence and admirably trained, that they did find their mark first time, and that Schlinsky's skill was duly recognized.

Toto was becoming more and more discontented. His dark eyes grew sadder, and his handsome face drooped. From being the hap-



piest man in Norway, he was everlastingly grumbling because he was not in France.

"That's the Legion all over," said the Colonel. "It's the essence of warfare—the maximum of detachment. If you're always asking yourself what you are fighting for, you'll never fight at all. Cilicia for the Greeks? China for the Chinese? Morocco for the Banques? The *méharis* for the *rezzous*? No, you must be detached from any sort of war-aims, you must just be soldiers by profession. What is my aim? To take Narvik. And why take Narvik? For the iron ore, for the anchovies, for the sake of the Norwegians? I haven't the faintest idea. But I shall take Narvik. Between ourselves, I don't think it will be any use. Either we blockade the ore by sea, in which case why trouble to take the town? Or we don't blockade it, on account of Sweden, or because Germany has already got plenty of iron in Lorraine, in which case it doesn't make any difference. I don't think I've ever taken part in a more useless campaign. We shan't even get any thanks for our pains, because all the big battles and the big honours will be in France, in the grand flare-up.

"That is precisely why the Legion is the most independent military unit in the world. And it is enabled to remain so because most legionaries have sacrificed their all, voluntarily, in order to join. I am speaking of the old hands,

not those who have been obliged to give up everything by force of circumstances, like our Spaniards or our Central Europeans. The more you give up, the more detached you are. And these are literally men without a name. Most of them have no relatives, no friends. True, the officers have their families, and they can think of the future, promotion, fame, their country. But they too must cultivate detachment. It's the essence of the man of action.

"All your zest for adventure, for fighting, for attacking, is based on that feeling of detachment. It's a question of character—and that, too, the Legion helps to build. Life counts less to the man who is detached, and practice and experience in action go to make up the attacking spirit. There is a great difference between the Legion and a reserve regiment. An ordinary regiment is made up of a mixed crowd of men. They like all sorts of things besides fighting. Here the men love fighting first, and after that drinking. I don't know if all ordinary soldiers love fighting. Fighting doesn't mean sacrifice only; that's probably easy enough, anyway. It means killing men—and killing them intelligently; that is to say, making those you don't kill run away, and at the same time advancing yourself."

"But, sir, how do you reconcile all this with what you said the other day about what you called the sword of the spirit? You talked about Cromwell and St. Just, and so forth."

## THE COLONEL ON THE LEGION

"I reconcile it very well," replied the Colonel. "Moral detachment and the attacking spirit are military questions. They are concerned with discipline and will-power—and those are indispensable factors in the professional army. That is why the Legion officer is a model for all, even though he may seem cold-blooded, as young Toto imagines he is. But your huge democratic armies, your thousands of officers, your millions of mobilized men need a flaming inspiration such as they had at the time of the French and English revolutions. Out of this fire, which is the fire of sacrifice, of readiness to die on the spot, another must be lit, that of the will to win, to advance, to achieve the ultimate victory. The people's commissaries, Cromwell's agitators, the missions to the armies of the Revolution all administered to this need. The Nazis, I think, have combined the two. You saw the prisoner I examined yesterday. What fanatical passion and hatred! I don't fancy it's going to be easy to beat them in France." (It was the 26th of May. We had little news, and the Colonel did not realize how truly he spoke.) "Still, let's take Narvik first, Toto—that's our immediate job."

Duff put in an appearance again, fair-haired, ruddy-cheeked, and, as the Colonel said, "looking the perfect gentleman, even when he hasn't shaved for five days—a thing I have never known to be tolerated in an officer of the Royal Navy."

He had got hold of a respectable pair of trousers now, and even turned up one day wearing a helmet. (He usually wore no hat ; his downy hair blew loosely in the wind.) He came to discuss plans for the co-operation of the Navy in the attack on Narvik.

"Tell him plainly that we don't want a repetition of that fooling at Bjerkvik, when they stopped firing an hour before the Legion landed. I want my chaps to land with the shells—you understand, *with* the shells. Otherwise, we just get a few shots, we duck, and that's the end. Each man takes his machine-gun, gets ashore somehow, and after that he can go to the devil ! It may seem a poor sort of joke, but there it is . . ."

"I can assure you, Colonel," said Duff, "that the commander of the *Fame* will do as you wish."

"If there's only one boat," said the Colonel, "so much the better. It'll be easier to make one understand than a whole squadron."

Actually, Commander Hubbock, Duff, and all the English sailors set to work with such good effect that the Colonel got not only a preliminary barrage up to the signal "Objective reached," but even something of a supporting barrage, or at any rate a continuous fire against a series of objectives in the course of the battle.

"I'm not telling you this because you're English, but because you're sailors. Sailors have only got one idea—to shoot straight, get the soldiers on shore as quickly as possible, without

## OUR PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

ammunition and without equipment, leave them to shift for themselves as best they can, and forget to come back and look for them. You are the only sailor and the only Englishman I've met who seems to have a glimmering of intelligence. Manche de Pelle, bring some coffee."

"But I assure you, Colonel, our regulations prescribe the very opposite to what you say. We are not allowed to go away unless you are safe, and we've got to land you dry, without wetting your feet."

"So I should think!" said the Colonel. "How do you think we can go into battle with wet feet? Still, I've done it before now," he reflected. "And it's deuced uncomfortable." Commander Hubbock had evidently put the Colonel in a good humour by promising to carry out his wishes as to the barrage.

The plan of operations was as follows. The *chasseurs* at Lilberg were to launch an attack, in reality a feint, towards the head of the Rombaken. The Legion, its two battalions strengthened by a battalion of Norwegians, would cross the Rombaken opposite Ojord, establish a bridge-head on the hill-top of Orneset, and expand it to the east and west. Then it would advance towards the railway and the tunnels, and carry the slope No. 457. This would cut off the Germans' retreat along the bank of the Rombaken, both by the railway and by the slope, for beyond that the mountains rose to a peak,

## OJORD

and the road along the Bjessfjord ended in a *cul-de-sac*, the head of the fjord. At the same time the Poles were to attack Ankeness and move down as rapidly as possible towards the head of the Bjessfjord. In addition, the Legion was to seize the hills north and west of the town and completely encircle it.

The naval guns at Ojord were to be reinforced by one Norwegian and two Colonial artillery batteries. Finally, two tanks were to be landed to assist in cleaning-up operations in the town.

This, broadly, was the plan of campaign. Zero hour was eagerly awaited.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

(May 28th, 1940)

THE attack was launched at midnight on May 28th. Simultaneously the *Fame* and other ships steamed into the fjord. The *Fame* bombarded the tunnels and other specific targets according to plan. The two Colonial artillery batteries on Hill 145 concentrated on the shore by the landing points, and the Norwegian battery joined in. The Germans replied. Their mobile guns, which were mounted on trucks, were brought out from the tunnels, and opened fire. A number of 77's, whose positions we thought we had located but which turned out to have been shifted, kept up an effective fire.

The legionaries had to pass beneath an archway of shells. The sun had now reached its lowest point, and the shadow of the hills of Ojord fell across the shore we were preparing to attack. Gathering shades darkened the mountains opposite. For a brief moment the shadows seemed to hesitate, then gradually closed in again. The snow was stained with rose. A

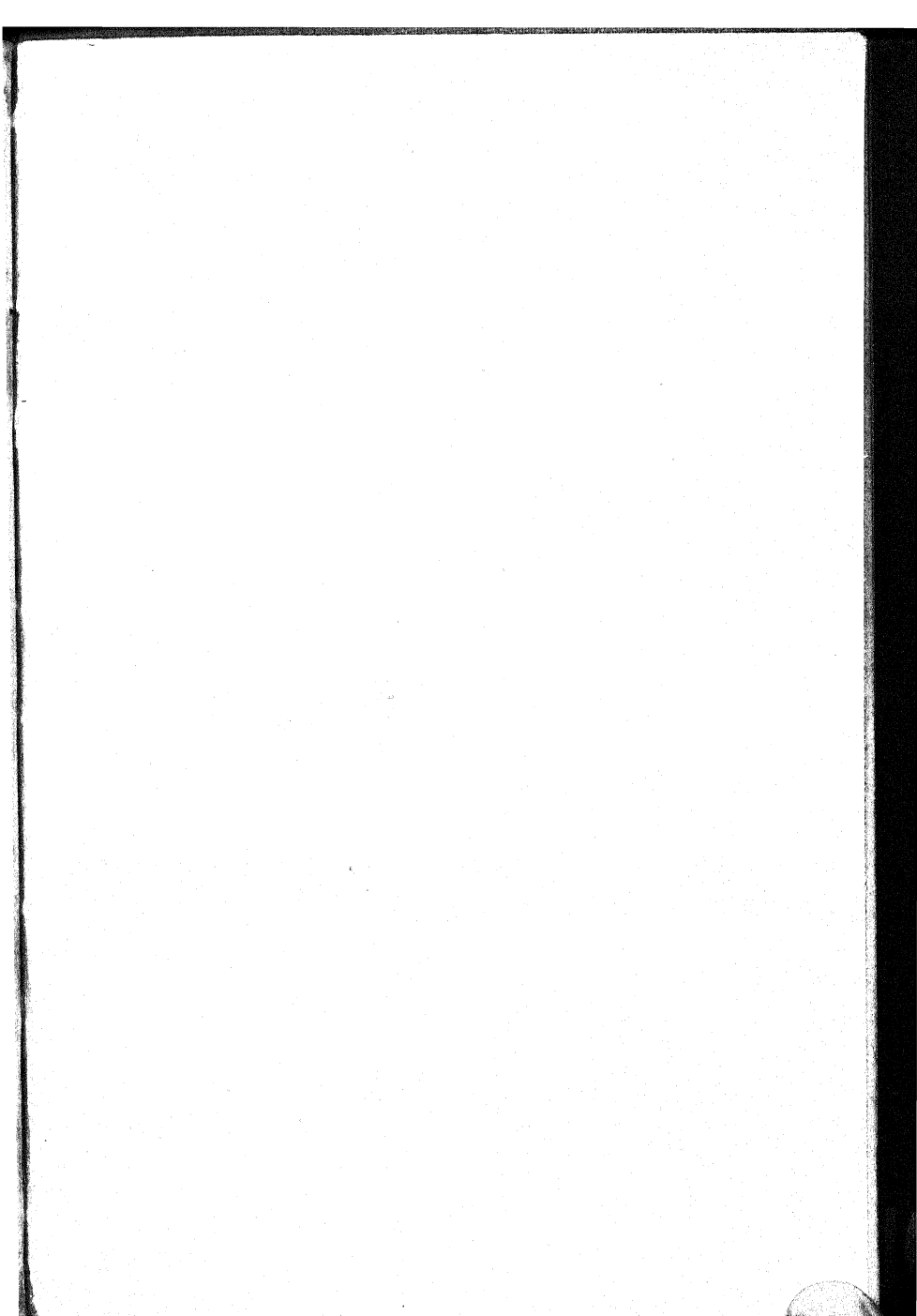


## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

column of smoke, mounting in a straight line through the shadows, spread out to form a crest of vivid purple.

The legionaries embarked. There were two points of departure. One, the nearer and more exposed, was Ojord, directly in view of the enemy. The other was hidden from sight and fire by the peninsula itself ; it was the little harbour of Seynes (where Duff had established his signalling station while we were at Ojord).

As soon as the armed ships and boats reached Ojord they were attacked by German 77's. The men filing through the woods and among the rocks took little notice of the shells. They moved steadily from on board the ships, thrilled at the prospect of the attack. Captain Guillemain, while taking cover with some men behind a rock near the harbour, was killed with his companions. Things looked black for a moment, for we had forgotten to arrange for the ambulance, which was a good distance away. But the companies of the 1st Battalion never slackened their efforts. They advanced under heavy bombardment towards the ridge of Orneset, immediately opposite Ojord. Their trail could be followed closely from the dark ships on the sea. They were seen to draw nearer, then to wheel round. Machine-guns rattled. But the men continued to disembark. Our intelligence had reported barbed wire between the rocks on the shore ; it apparently caused little trouble,





*French tanks in the Ojord Peninsula  
Bren-gunning on the bank of the fjord*

## THE RIDGE OF ORNESET IS TAKEN

for our men plunged headlong into the woods on landing, and were lost to sight. The birches growing on this ridge were already in leaf. The shadow of daybreak, the slender branches, the sprouting foliage, and distance itself now hid every movement on land. The Colonel, at the gunners' observation post, ordered the bombardment of the ridge to be continued.

"Until the ridge is taken," he said.

The landings went on. The battery of 77's which had bombarded Ojord so accurately now appeared to be silent. But another battery was firing its shells over our heads, either with the intention of battering the top off our observation-post, or in an effort to bombard Seynes. Suddenly a rocket burst over the ridge of Orneset. "Objective reached."

"Come on!" said the Colonel.

"You are firing on us," a second rocket signalled. We ceased fire.

The bridgehead had been established. The next task was to extend it, organize a strong starting-off base, and pack it with men, arms, and material. It was 1 o'clock. The job should be all over by 3 o'clock, we thought. But things turned out very differently.

The Colonel had decided to proceed himself to Orneset as soon as the objective was reached, without waiting for the rest of the battalion or the troops. His chief task, that of leading the supporting artillery, was done. The infantry

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attack was now about to commence, and he wanted to be on the spot.

We had a series of adventures. The most amusing of these was at Ojord, where we got into a traffic jam caused by a broken-down car, to the driver of which the Colonel said encouragingly, "This is the precise spot that the 77's are aiming at!" The most annoying was seeing the last boat leave Ojord before our very eyes, so that we had to embark at Seynes. However, we finally reached the shores of Orneset. It could hardly be called a comfortable landing: smooth square pebbles and broken pieces of black slate, covered with thick seaweed and slippery with pools of water, made the approach of boats far from easy. Beyond them the same slaty rocks as before, but now of a greyish colour, stood massed row upon row. The Germans had begun to place barbed wire between them. But the work had not been completed, nor had it been carried out at all thoroughly. In the background the slopes of Orneset rose to about 250 feet. They were dotted with rocks between which grasses and lichens sprouted and birches thrust their slender stems. The firing went on continuously. We could hear the bullets whistling. The men had taken shelter among the rocks.

After giving orders for temporary H.Q. to be set up behind a rock whence there was a good view of Narvik, the Colonel went on in front.

## LOCHE TURNS UP

The chief of staff, Cazeau, who was recovering from an attack of malaria, said to me: "I suppose you haven't any milk?" I had a small thermos of hot tea and milk and we shared it. He drank his tea and opened his portfolio. He began calmly to issue his orders, classify his papers, and check lists.

"Where's Loche?" he asked.

Loche was his orderly. He was big and flabby, but very attentive. He used to be a ladies' hairdresser in a large establishment in Paris, and was fastidious over his toilet, his complexion, his hands, and his conversation. He spoke faultless French, with a slightly affected accent, and never swore; and all this was a matter for wonder in this Legion where they used every language under the sun mixed with pidgin French.

Loche turned up, as placid as ever. "I must catch the post, sir," he said. "Madame Cazeau specially asked me. 'Loche,' she said, 'don't you ever leave my husband, and mind you write to me regularly.' Well, I'm going to write to her now."

"Wait till to-night, Loche, when we've taken Narvik."

"I can't, sir. I want to send the letter by the ammunition ship which is just leaving. I've got a pal on board."

The bullets sizzled round about Loche while he sat writing his letter to Madame Com-

## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

mandant, describing in high-flown phrases his chief's attack of malaria.

On our right, the ridge fell abruptly to a beach. This was Narvik beach, called Taraldsvik. A few houses stretched as far as the shore. There were one or two inns near the wharf, and a stream rippled merrily to the sea. In the background rose Hill 79 and Hill 102, thick with trees and affording Narvik protection from the north and west winds. Across the fields the town itself tumbled down to the harbour, now lying invisible on the Bjessfjord. The square wooden houses, painted in every conceivable colour, were all huddled together. But we did not have a view of the town as a whole. It was very warm. We pictured to ourselves what this place must have been like in normal times: fair-haired young men and women coming down to bathe, dancing in the taverns, picking berries in the woods. And now a tank had just been landed near the diving-board. It crawled forward, then stopped with a rumbling noise. It had got stuck in the clay and was unable to move. Another tank, sent to the rescue, had met with a similar fate. Tanks seemed to be unlucky in Norway. The very first one to arrive had fallen into the water while being landed at Harstadt. The officer inside had the presence of mind to let the water come in before opening the door to get out (the water was many feet deep).



## GERMAN BOMBERS APPEAR OVERHEAD

On this occasion there were at least two men in the tank. They were nearly roasted in the sun, miles from any accompanying infantry, and totally ignorant of what was going on. As the tank had been landed at the mouth of the stream, at a spot well away from the enemy's line of vision, they probably failed to notice it.

Progress from Seynes was exasperatingly slow. We had only one battalion of the Legion, and that was under strength ; a Norwegian battalion had just reached the expanded bridgehead. The English 'planes, which had appeared on the scene, and had been keeping a careful watch since 8 o'clock the previous evening, ended their patrol at 3 o'clock. In the ordinary way the transport of all the troops should have been carried out by then. Actually it was not completed till 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

German bombers appeared overhead. They attacked the transports and the warships—grazing the flagship—obstructed the "puffers," blew up our "monkey house" (as Manche de Pelle afterwards told us), and bombed and machine-gunned our front lines.

The situation here was serious, and before long it got worse. Going in an easterly direction, the ridge of Orneset descended into a pass which climbed from the other side and led to the railway. On the farther side of the railway was a rocky stretch thinly planted with trees, known as Plateau 457. I have shown

## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

how the Germans, threatened with encirclement in Narvik, had only one line of retreat (the road by the Bjessfjord was no use to them) : this was the railway along the Rombaken. But since a number of regiments could not pass along a rail-track exposed to fire, they had to seize the plateau. The slopes were impracticable, firstly because they were too steep, and secondly because they were under artillery fire. The plateau, on the other hand, owing to its hilly contours, was out of sight and beyond the range of fire. The Germans therefore had to defend its approaches fiercely. This they did with considerable skill. The legionaries had been fighting since midnight. They had scaled and captured Orneset, and were moving to the assault of Plateau 457. Everywhere they had met with strong resistance. Though they had discarded their baggage, they were panting, sweating under the sun, parched (for there was no water), and advancing with the sun in their eyes against an enemy who fired at them from behind rocks high above them. The Norwegians had kept their baggage ; they had moved their weapons and machine-guns forward with great agility. But to our legionaries they seemed rather slow : "They sleep on their guns." Actually they were hard-working and intelligent lads, keen to do well, though a little nervous of fighting by the side of the Legion. Anyway, who knows whether they had ever

## THE GERMANS BREAK THROUGH

been under fire before? I doubt it. And one cannot expect great deeds of young soldiers first time. We only learn through failure.

Plateau 457 loomed before us like a sombre picture. The sun glittered on the helmets, and the line of battle, with its ebb and flow, appeared as if thrown on to a cinema-screen. The aerial attack had made the men slacken; they began to feel exhausted. The Germans took advantage of this and proceeded to infiltrate. Then they counter-attacked, pressing heavily against the Norwegians. This counter-attack succeeded. While certain of our units had almost reached the top of the first slopes, the Germans broke through lower down, near the railway-line and the pass leading to Orneset, and brought up their machine-guns. They moved to cut off the troops engaged on the slopes from the beach at Orneset. In fact, they were already raking with fire the place where we had landed. Duff—who had rescued two men from an ammunition-ship that had been blown up—shifted the landing-place of the “puffers” to the west, and ordered a covering fire for his own landing, at the side of the beach where the tank was still stuck in the mud. Commandant Paris, standing upright in an armoured boat, left to deliver his report to the General.

“Lie down,” said the officer on board, as he closed the casemate.

“It doesn’t matter. You’ve only got to

## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

go straight ahead. I'm all right." At that moment a burst of machine-gun fire struck him down.

A machine-gun nest was installed close to Commandant Cazeau's post and covered the landing against possible attack from the shore. Hubert, the secretary-typist, who was always in a good humour, had found jam and bully-beef in a German dug-out.

"I expect it's that poor devil over there who was having a good blow-out," he said to me, pointing to a German marine lying on his back, his face suffused with the pallor of death. And he continued tapping away at his machine with his mouth full of jam, under the benevolent eye of Commandant Cazeau.

"It's a bad business," said the Commandant, for all the world as if he were saying "It's a fine day."—"They've just dealt out Bren guns to the staff. Incidentally, the Colonel wants you."

"I've been seeing to the ammunition," I said. "I rather fancy it was necessary—the ship's just blown up."

"Don't tell the men."

"I certainly won't."

The Colonel was wonderful. Standing on top of the ridge in the sunshine, in full view of the enemy, freshly shaved, his sword-belt brightly polished, his medals flashing, his ski-spectacles pushed up over his helmet to enable him to

## THE COLONEL GOES INTO ACTION

follow the movements of his troops through field-glasses, his coolness was incredible.

A flat rock by his side served him for a desk.

"*Nom de Dieu de Norvégiens !*" yelled Commandant Boyer-Resses.

"You can't expect everybody to fight for twenty-five years," the Colonel remarked quietly.

Boyer-Resses looked at him, puzzled.

"Yes, you and I have been fighting since 1914—that makes twenty-five years. These boys have been fighting for twenty minutes. Still, if we carry on with the war here, I reckon they'll make excellent soldiers in twenty days. Look," he went on, turning to me, "Vincent has just been wounded while writing out my orders. See to him. Now how about the ammunition?"

I gave him the results of my enquiries: "Toto has examined them," I said.

"Toto's real job is to give me information about the enemy. It's much more interesting."

Just then the Colonial artillery, in an effort to give us every aid in our resistance, opened fire on Plateau 457. The shells, however, fell among our own men. There was a tremendous outcry.

"Why can't they fire a rocket, the idiots?"

The Commandant of the *Fame*, seeing that things were going badly, also opened fire on the same spot. There was a further outcry.

"Where's Duff?" said the Colonel.

"He's gone to shift the landing-place. They're being machine-gunned on the first beach."

## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

"Go and help him fix it, with the *Fame*. You know where to find them?"

"Yes, sir."

"And issue the order for the counter-attack."

### ORDER OF THE DAY

7h. 10. The position is as follows :

(1) Hill 457 has not been occupied by the Norwegian Battalion. The Germans are established there. They have counter-attacked and taken the south-eastern part of the bridgehead.

The Norwegian battalion has given up the ravine between Orneset ridge and the counter-forts of Hill 457.

(2) I/13 and the elements of II/13 will re-establish the bridgehead.

(a) First Battalion facing bridgehead, including lost part south.

(b) II/13 will occupy western part of Orneset ridge with two sections and will form battalion reserve.

(c) Norwegian Battalion, whose elements are on the south part in conjunction with the 2nd Company, will hold themselves in readiness (*rassemblement articulé*).

This reorganization is required of general officers and field officers who are already at their stations.

(3) As soon as the bridgehead is re-established, the objective will be to recapture Hill 457 and

## EXHAUSTED TROOPS COUNTER-ATTACK

establish the Norwegian Battalion on it so that it can *continue* its advance.

(4) Meanwhile, naval gunfire is to be directed upon Hill 457.

Signed : Lieut.-Colonel commanding  
13th Demi-Brigade

MAGRIN.

This was the order that he had just issued. I could sense a flicker of doubt in the eyes of the officers present. That troops exhausted by heat, thirst, a steep climb, a battle, counter-attacked, forced back, and fired on by their own men, should be expected to counter-attack in turn, without reserves and almost at the end of their ammunition, was, to say the least, a bold plan.

I scrambled down among the rocks. A number of wounded were waiting, together with some prisoners. The Norwegians were dressed in apple-green, like the Germans, and the Germans, as I have already said, had borrowed Norwegian uniforms. I found the adjutant, Vincent, on a stretcher near the sea-shore.

"Say good-bye to the Colonel for me, lieutenant. A good job it didn't happen to him. Ah, he's always the same!" Vincent had always followed the Colonel, and had joined him voluntarily.

Duff, standing half in the water, was supervising the unloading of an armoured boat. He



## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

gave a hand himself, and made cases of grenades hurtle through the air. A row of prisoners and legionaries passed them from hand to hand. I showed him the orders, pointing out the places to be bombarded.

"That one over there is impossible with a naval gun," he said. "But this one—yes." And his signalling apparatus was soon clicking.

The counter-attack was successful. The Legion inspired the Norwegians. The two forces joined together and flung the Germans back. A fresh supply of ammunition arrived. Transport and communications were reorganized. Presently Commandant Boyer-Resses appeared on the plateau looking like some giant of the mountains. We abandoned the idea of fetching up the Norwegians and hurling them on the south-east of Narvik, which had been the original plan. They went down again to the south of Orneset, re-formed by the spring, and entered the town by the suburb leading to the beach at Taraldsvik. All they had to do was clean up the town: the people told them at once that the Germans had gone away.

The General sent a message asking for a company to be sent to reinforce the Poles who were in difficulties at Ankeness. "Do they want the 63 men guarding the luggage at Scarness?" answered the Colonel.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion, which had now been moved across, had occupied, in quick

succession, Hills 79 and 102, which overlook Taraldsvik.

"I've got a surprise for you," said Captain Ponthieu to the Colonel. "You told me to take 79, but I've taken 102 as well."

"Good Lord!" said the Colonel. "I've done nothing all day. Lapie, come with me."

And crossing the rocks, he went down into Narvik. We found a car, commandeered it, and drove to the other end of the town. Here we got out and set off through a sort of thicket down to the Bjessfjord. A Norwegian civilian accompanied us; Schlinsky, who had overtaken us, also joined the party; and a legionary, who had seen us pass, followed close behind.

"You haven't your revolver, Lieutenant."

He gave me his own and took his carbine in his hand. Suddenly we caught sight of greenish uniforms in the bushes. The Colonel, who usually limped a little and walked slowly on account of old wounds, flung himself forward with unexpected agility. A number of green arms poked themselves through the bushes: "Norwegian, Norwegian." They were Norwegian soldiers who had already found girl friends and were taking them for a walk. The civilian pointed out to us the gun emplacements; most of them had been partly dismantled before being abandoned.

We arrived opposite Ankeness, at the extreme end of Cape Lygte.

## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

"Nothing ever seems to happen in this place," said the Colonel. "And to think they wanted a company of mine to help those fellows ! Not a single shot. Schlinsky, fire that thing of yours, just to show them that we're here."

The "thing" was an A.A. gun, of which the breech was missing. Naturally, we couldn't do anything with it.

On the headland was an encampment with a swastika flag. We took it away as a souvenir. Returning by the sea-shore, we saw an English destroyer cruising in the offing.

"We must give them a signal," said the Colonel, "and show them who we are."

It was a pity Duff was not there with his signalling apparatus. We waved our handkerchiefs. If we had been seen we should have been taken for a stranded party. Somebody suggested waving the swastika flag. But the proposal met with no response. The destroyer continued cruising and totally ignored our gesticulations. Perhaps it never saw us. It was nearly midnight and it was getting dark. Clouds were gathering. We couldn't see clearly for more than a mile.

When we got back to the town, the Colonel gave orders for the 2nd Battalion to occupy Fagerness as well. Lygte, where we had just been, formed one of the curves of Narvik harbour ; Fagerness was the other. Thus, if as the

## NARVIK IS SURROUNDED ON THREE SIDES

result of Polish pressure on Ankeness the Germans tried to cross the fjord to take the road to Bjess, they would meet with a hot reception. At the same time the town of Narvik was surrounded externally at its three principal points, in case by some extraordinary chance there should be Germans inside ; and the Norwegians had the honour—which was theirs by right—of being in garrison alone in their own town.

"You are the master-at-arms," said the Colonel to the Norwegian major, "and as long as we are in the town, I am under your orders."

The people came out on their doorsteps, dressed in summer clothes, most of the women wearing grey flannel trousers. They smiled but had little to say, so astonished were they at being delivered at last, after being told every day for two months of the imminent arrival of the Allies, and even of the capture of the town. The French flag was hoisted by the side of the Norwegian.

"What would you like us to give you ?" said one man who spoke a little English.

"Something to eat," said the Colonel, "and if possible uncooked—green stuff, fruit, salads."

The Norwegian was distressed. He had nothing of the kind.

"Well, some anchovy paste, then, and bilberry jam—and some bread."

We had an excellent dinner of anchovies and

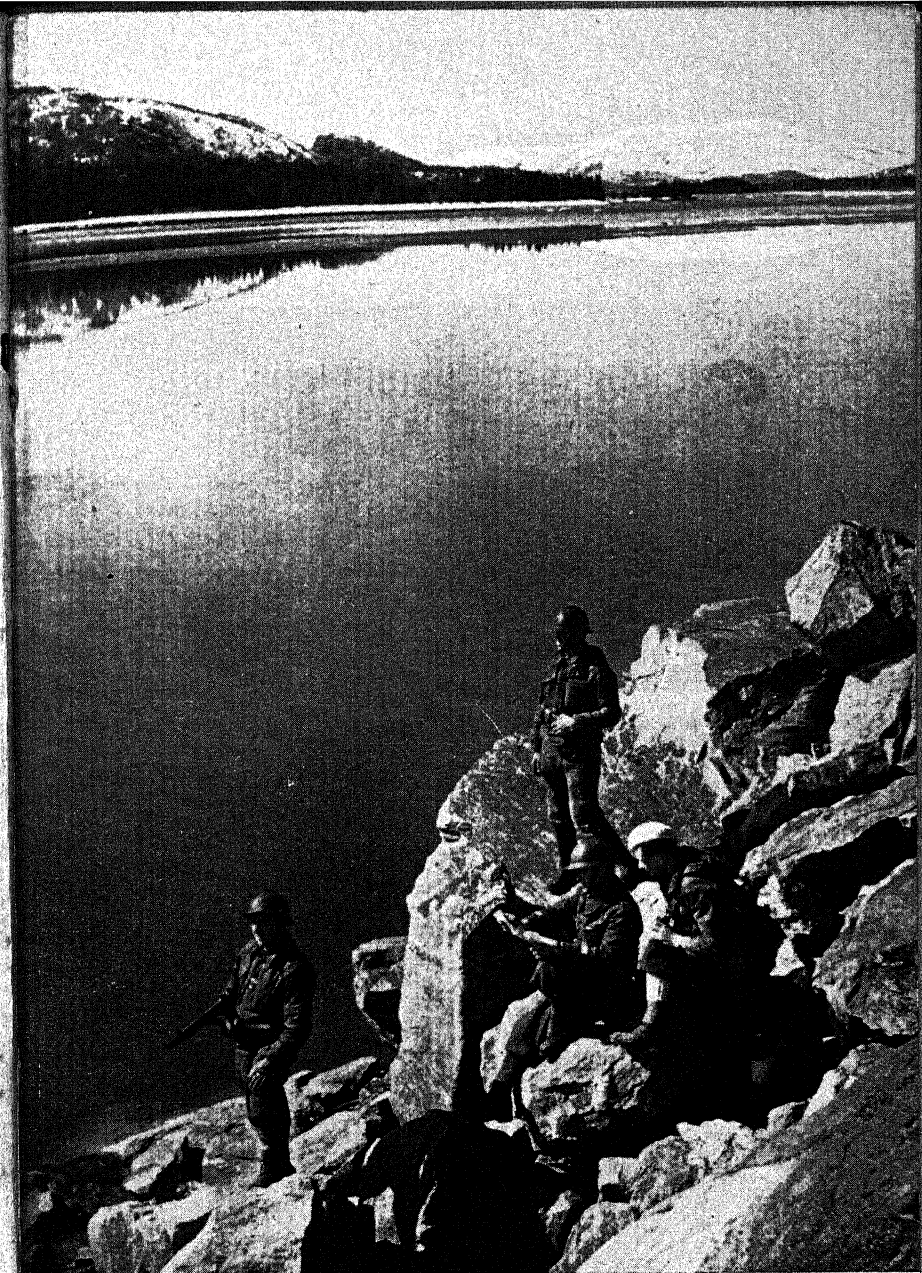
## THE CAPTURE OF NARVIK

bilberries on new bread—which we had not tasted for at least a fortnight. The anchovies made us terribly thirsty. They had no wine of any sort, nor any beer. They gave us water—and I don't suppose we had drunk any since the morning. A few days later, with much ceremony, an authority of the town made the Legion a present of three bottles of cognac, the only ones left in the place. They were keenly appreciated.

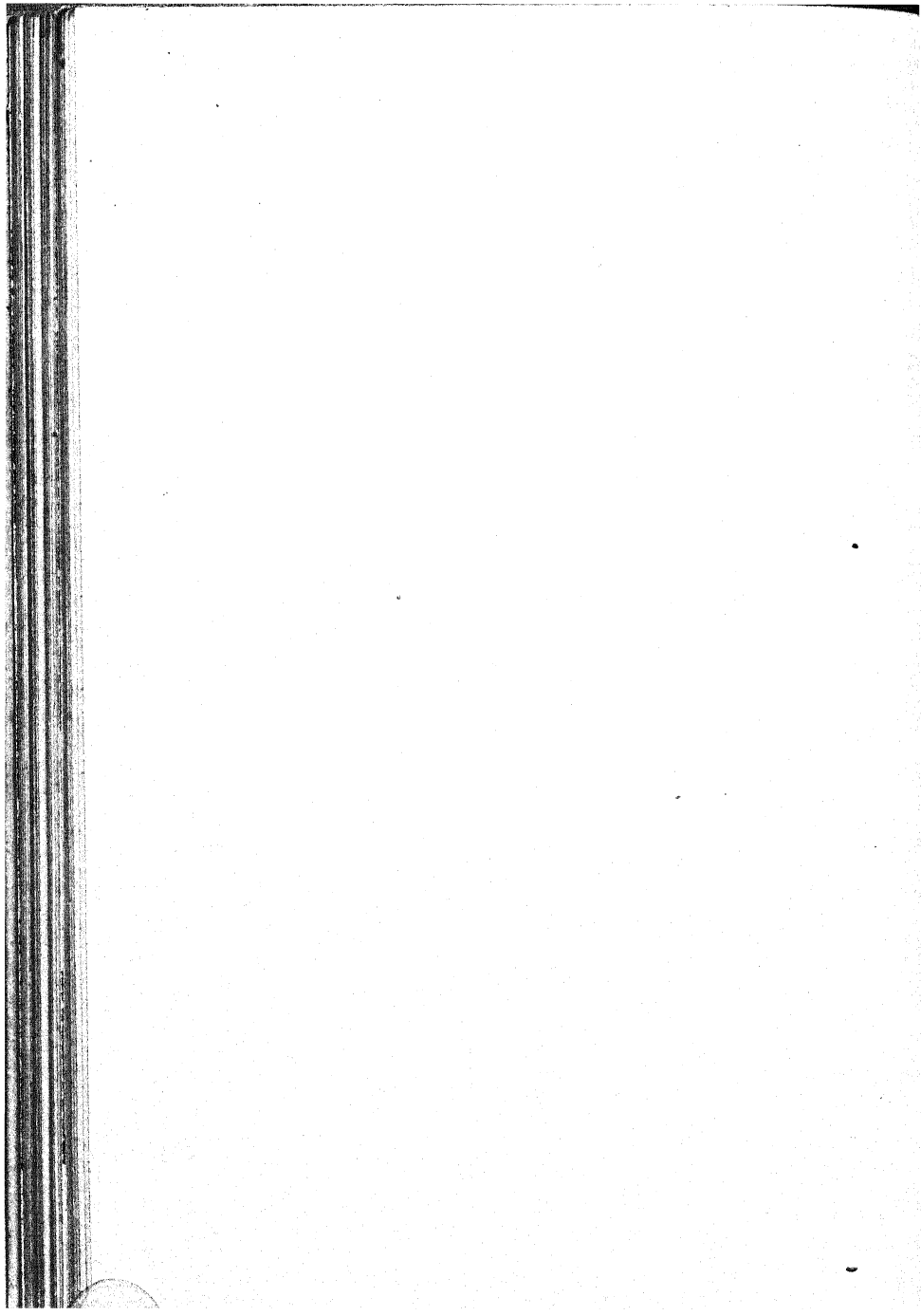
I must place on record the delicacy and spontaneity with which the population welcomed us. These people had almost nothing to give, but the little they had they gave freely. Blockaded by the Allies for two months, after falling into German hands, they were on the verge of famine. In addition, we had been obliged to bombard them and set some of their houses on fire—which they can hardly have enjoyed. Most of them offered us their houses, and were distressed when the Colonel refused to accept their hospitality either for himself or for his officers.

“We'll stay in Orneset,” he said. “The war is not over merely because we have taken Narvik.”

A few days later a delegation presented us with a red and green flag of the Foreign Legion, embroidered with the arms of Narvik and bearing the words: “13th Demi-Brigade of the Foreign Legion, Bjerkvik and Narvik.” This flag re-



*Légionnaires and chasseurs on patrol*





#### THE LEGION RECORDS A VICTORY

placed the one given to us by Colonel Brillat-Savarin, which had been destroyed by fire in the bombardment of the Colonel's H.Q. at Bjerkvik.

The Legion had recorded its first victory.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE CHASE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

"WELL, that's Sweden over there, I suppose?" said Ignacio.

"So the officer said," replied Bellarmin.

"It doesn't look far, as the crow flies."

"No, only a few miles, but there's the Sierra."

"Norwegian Sierra" seems a contradiction at first sight—a confusion of South with North. But the fighters from Guadalajara always called these mountains beyond the Arctic Circle the "sierra."

A short distance away two other legionaries, also perched in a crevice among the rocks, were having an argument.

"Talk about the Riff—it's far worse than the Atlas here."

A patrol of ski-scouts had halted in the Fagerness Mountains. They had reached the highest point. The swastika flag, which had flown over Narvik for two months, had been taken down and replaced by the Norwegian flag. To the north, by the side of the railway and the Rombaken, a battalion was marching towards Strömness. To the south, along the Bjessfjord,

another battalion had joined up with the Poles. The task was now to clear the space formed by the angle of these two branches. This seemed a simple enough task on paper. But the space consisted of a mountainous mass stretching from Mount Fagerness right down to the two fjords, the Rombaken and the Bjessfjord, with watersheds, precipitous bluffs, faults, long snow-covered inclines, unexpected barriers of rock, fallen ground; then perhaps a sudden bed of moss, or a rushing stream.

"Just think of it! They've probably got sun down below, while here it's snowing—if you can call this snow."

A kind of frozen mist was falling, like tiny needles pricking the face and eyes, and even penetrating the fur snow-jackets. Between two of these storms of frozen dust, the sun came out, shooting its rays across the snow till it dazzled the men, throwing into relief other peaks and snow-fields, with the silvery rocks of the Swedish frontier in the distance.

"We'll soon push them over into Sweden," said Ignacio, "and then we can go back."

"Back where?" said Bellarmin.

"Down below, by the sea, where the sun's shining, and we can go for a walk in the town."

"The town's on fire," said Bellarmin. "You saw the smoke in the sky yesterday, after the planes had been over. No, once we're out of

## THE CHASE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

this snow, we shall be off to some other sierra. That's certain."

A dark patch began to mingle with the fog and dim the unending daylight. All of a sudden they could see nothing in the distance. The cold shadow deepened over the sentry-posts, and they could not make out even the one nearest to them.

"I don't know where we are," said Ignacio presently. "Go and find out."

Bellarmin leant his skis against a rock, and walked slowly across the snow. Presently he stepped abruptly out of the fog and found himself facing the tiny sentry-post on the left.

"Now if I were a Boche, I'd capture you," he said.

They laughed.

"Can *you* see anything?"

The sentry shrugged and pointed silently to the thick fog. His form was totally enveloped. He had wrapped his scarf round his head, under his helmet, and was constantly taking off and putting on his glasses, not knowing which way would help him to see better. By his side a comrade had made a sort of hollow tomb out of the sloping rock, and lay there shivering and trying to sleep. The snow was melting around him and began to trickle down his neck.

"The sergeant saw some men passing," said the legionary, "but they were a long way away, on the other side of the valley. They

seemed to be making for Sweden. They were Chleuhs."<sup>1</sup>

"Couldn't you have gone after them?"

"No, we hadn't got a guard up here then, and we didn't want to expose ourselves in front."

"So some more of them have got away!" said Bellarmin in disgust.

The legionary shrugged his shoulders philosophically and kept silent. Bellarmin made a sign to move on. At that moment the sun burst between the clouds and flooded the peak.

"Down you go then, you old fool," said the legionary. "And they'll see you a mile away on the snow, dirty as you are."

Bellarmin did not seem to take this any too well.

"All right," said the legionary, "have a drink." Bellarmin took a long pull at the flask. "Here, steady! We haven't got much left."

Fresh supplies were indeed few and far between. The men had been in the mountains for twenty-four hours; they had eaten all their bully-beef and biscuits and nearly emptied their flasks. But they still had hope. They were not yet actually starving.

"Any news?" asked Ignacio.

"No. The Boches are going away."

"And nobody's going after them?"

"We're not, anyway."

<sup>1</sup> Legionaries who have fought in Morocco call all enemy soldiers "chleuhs."

"And what about grub?"

"We haven't got any. Nothing ever comes along the railway. The chaps down below don't bother. They pinch everything as it comes, and it's too much fag to climb up here. They don't like the snow. They keep indoors."

The food stores were at the foot of the Orneset. From there supplies had to be hoisted up to the railway, then carried for several miles. We had tried supplying the advance battalion by boat, but the Germans fired on the ships from a corner of the cliffs. Eventually we used mules, which were able to climb from post to post in the mountains, to the various companies in action. Even then, the men had to leave the mules and go on alone to the extreme tops of the mountains, over snow and rocks, in order to find the ski-patrols, which were always on the move and difficult to locate.

A rocket was fired from the next peak, and a moment later a skier appeared from behind, carrying his skis on his shoulder. He stooped to put them on behind a rock, took a glance round the district, and made a sign. Lieutenant Geoffroy came up, looking rather ungainly in his hood, unshaven, and colossal in his woollen wrappings. He inspected the surrounding country, now fortunately visible again, and issued orders as to direction, stopping-points, and the situation of the posts in front and on the flanks. Then he went off. The grating sound of skis

## THE SKIERS SET OUT

moving in file swept over the snow. Fifteen skiers flashed by and were lost to sight in the mist.

"When do we go?" asked Bellarmin.

"You heard what the officer said—when you see them on the slope over there."

"Supposing the fog doesn't lift?"

"The fog always lifts."

They put on their skis, adjusted the straps, fastened their packs, and set off to the right. After getting lost in the silence and the blend of fog and light through being deceived by the changed aspect of rocks which they took as guiding-points, they succeeded in rejoining Geoffroy on his left. Geoffroy cursed them and sent them to their positions. All of them noticed the new panorama, which somehow appeared the same and yet different. The mountain did not seem so high. The snow had nearly disappeared, quite abruptly. Huge black arteries of rock intersected the snowfields. They did not know whether to use their skis or go on foot. The mist hung everywhere, but it was no longer a snowy one. In fact, it was almost warm.

"I can't see Fritz anywhere," said Geoffroy.

There appeared to be no living creature on the mountain. Geoffroy forgot about the chase for a moment. The grandeur of the scene held him. He was a tourist, and he felt at peace with the world. Behind him the sun drew out



shadows from the mountains. A haze hung over the farthestmost pinnacles. Under this canopy the outline of the ridges and valleys stood out as clearly as if on a relief map, having something of the artificial appearance of a varnished print mounted on pasteboard.

"Bren gun," said a look-out man suddenly.

Geoffroy came down to earth. "Where?"

"To the left, near that huge black bit that juts out."

They listened. *Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat.*

"French?"

"I don't know." Five more shots sounded.

"It's not coming from where our chaps are," said Geoffroy.

They deployed, spread out their formation, became an advance curtain, searching in every direction, trying to see.

"It's on the other side," said a sergeant (or an echo). "Anyhow, there's no reply."

At that moment the Germans came in sight along a sort of pass, moving one by one, at wide intervals. Their green uniforms could be clearly distinguished.

"*En avant!*" cried Geoffroy.

The usual manœuvre of sliding at full speed down the slope, skimming through the snow, pulling up with brilliant skill, and shooting forward again at an even greater speed, was here of no avail. Skis were actually a hindrance, for carrying them on the shoulder over rocky passes

disturbed one's balance. The few patches of snow that existed were too small to be of any use. The march was slow and exhausting, both over the snow and over the rocky inclines. Moreover, they had to be constantly on their guard against a sudden approach of the enemy. The group that had been partly located was probably not the only one in the neighbourhood, and they were almost certain to have placed rearguard-posts to cover them. And most important of all, one never knew for certain where one was.

• However, the patrol presently came across a small German post that had just been abandoned : trampled snow, tin boxes, foot-prints in the snow disappearing over the black flints. So the hours passed, with constant halts, whispered conversations, long waits, then the march on again. The men felt hungry and thirsty. They began to get out of breath too and longed for a rest, though they said nothing. But Geoffroy wanted to reach a line from which he could organize his guards, and he exerted every effort. They were now climbing over slippery rocks, looking for a road, frequently bruising themselves against jagged buttresses and feeling their way at the risk of their lives over narrow ledges. The fog had lifted, the sun had come again over the mountains : it should be morning by now. Geoffroy organized his posts, guards, and reliefs. He surveyed

the position, saw nothing, and ordered his men to rest.

"They may as well go to sleep too," he said.

"And what about grub?" said Ignacio.

"I haven't got any, any more than you have," said Geoffroy. "And I don't reckon we *shall* get any either—not for a long time. Here's half a biscuit."

"They make the throat dry," said Ignacio.

All the same, he accepted the biscuit the lieutenant offered, munching it slowly to make it last. Geoffroy himself fell into a sudden torpor of cold, weariness and hunger, and his half-chewed biscuit remained stuck in his gullet. He dreamt of railways. Presently someone woke him.

"Drink?" he said.

"No, sir, I'm afraid there isn't any. But there's somebody on the slope opposite. He's coming this way."

Instantly Geoffroy was on his feet, hunger and fatigue forgotten. He adjusted his field-glasses and looked in the direction indicated. A solitary man, carrying his skis on his shoulder, was advancing slowly and cautiously, his eyes glued to the mountain-path. It was not possible to distinguish his uniform.

"Looks like one of our hoods," said Geoffroy.

"That's what I thought. But he's coming from the other side, so he can't be a Norwegian, or a German."

"Perhaps it's a legionary who shot ahead of us and is coming back."

"He couldn't have gone on so far ; the other patrol is level with us."

"He looks done in."

The man stopped and turned as if he were about to sit down. He put on his skis to cover the next few yards. He tried to cross a line of rocks with his skis still on, then hesitated, stooped and took them off, and threw them in front of him on to the next patch of snow.

"He's crazy, he'll smash them !"

As if he had heard, the man went and picked up his skis, placed them on his shoulder again and resumed his slow and cautious walk down to the foot of the valley.

"Three men go and meet him," ordered Geoffroy. "And don't make any noise about it."

The legionaries went down, keeping a good distance apart, and hiding from rock to rock. The man had disappeared behind the curve of the mountain. The others waited for half an hour, then one of the legionaries returned.

"It's a Polish officer, lieutenant."

"What's he doing here ?"

"He says he's trying to make a contact."

"Well, he's made it," said Geoffroy. "But across the German line of retreat. He's got a nerve, but he can count himself damned lucky."

The Pole had left Bjessfjord with his patrol on

## THE CHASE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

a reconnaissance, trying to link up with the 1st Battalion on the Rombaken by cutting across the peninsula at its base. He had forged ahead over the slopes, and the fog had cut him off from his comrades. He had been going due north, thinking he had reached the Rombaken. But the mountain was more difficult than he had imagined. He had got only half-way across. He had seen some German patrols going on relief; luckily they had not caught sight of him.

"What a nerve!" cried the legionaries in admiration. "Crossing the country entirely alone, with Chleuhs everywhere!" And they gazed respectfully at the white eagle on their comrade's béret, wishing they had something to offer him by way of refreshment. Two men were left with him while he rested, in spite of his protestations. The advance continued, with the routine as before.

About 11 o'clock the German planes came over, as they did every morning. They wheeled round the end of the Rombaken and dropped parachutes. These, we discovered later, contained ammunition, food, letters, and newspapers. Making the most of their flight, the supporting planes observed the position, circled over the mountain, and disappeared in the direction of Sweden. All our men had flung themselves down against the rocks. The sun was shining. More and more of the snow melted,

and little rivulets gleamed on the dark granite. It began to look like a pleasure-trip for the men. But Geoffroy would not relax marching discipline. Nobody else came in sight. The men no longer thought about their safety. All they thought about was their hunger.

"Send someone to the left," said Geoffroy, "to ask for food. The top of this ridge will be our rallying-point. Wait a minute. Here's a written order, with a sketch-map and a letter for the commander of the 1st Battalion. You three stay here, and if any food turns up don't eat it all."

The scouts reported an enemy force in retreat. The march continued. Now and again a Bren gun rattled, but for all they knew it might have been the noise of the battle still going on by the railway. The mountain now seemed dull and heavy. Just as the steepest incline appeared about to lead down gently to a charming valley, it would suddenly shoot uphill and confront one with a solid wall of basalt, to skirt round which one had to go miles out of the way and risk losing the general direction altogether. Geoffroy was thinking of death. The Spaniards stopped their humming. The silence was unbroken save for the sound of footsteps on the rocks.

"They talk a lot about the war-dead," thought Geoffroy. "But what are they compared with the peacetime-dead? The soldier is dedicated to death, just as a child is christened at the font.

## THE CHASE ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

It's his business, anyway. But what about all those I have seen die in despair, killed by the evils of peace?—speed, drugs, tuberculosis in the young? It has all happened since 1918—the craze for rushing through life and getting success quickly. The frenzied competition among young people who haven't finished growing and who are carried off because they have no resistance against the diseases that threaten later life. The excitement of indulging a young life almost before it has begun, or the mad rush to oblivion through drugs—how many I have seen go that way!”

Faces he had known, talks he had had, secrets he had shared, all crossed through Geoffroy's mind. “To me,” he reflected, “the deaths of these young people who have scarcely lived are more tragic than the present necessary murders of men by men. Or can it be that the first were only a stepping-stone to the second?”

And he fell to thinking of the death of the woman whom as a young man he had loved with an almost mystical devotion, upon whose memory he had built a strange inner existence, made up of a belief in eternity, a Catholic fetish, and the two-sided life of the legionary, with its singular combination of religion and fighting.

As all these thoughts ran through his mind, like an intoxication of exhaustion and day-dreams, a runner came up breathlessly, waving



#### A RUNNER ARRIVES

a piece of paper crossed in red pencil. The commander of the 1st Battalion had ordered Geoffroy to join him, since he now had a strong enough cover for his right. He reported the despatch of a provision-party incidentally.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON THE ROMBAKEN

WHEN I returned, in advance of the Colonel, to H.Q. at Orneset, I found Commandant Cazeau at loggerheads with General Béthouart. The General was furious.

"You call that pursuing the enemy? Why, I saw the Germans from my boat, all the way along the railway, as calm as could be! They were marching and pushing their carts; and every now and then they stopped to blow up a tunnel. And what were you doing all the time? They tell me you were at 103. There was nobody at 103. Fortunately, things went better on the other side. I bombarded Fagerness."

The General strode up and down, feeling very pleased at what he had done. I was about to open my mouth; but Cazeau signed to me to keep quiet, though he cannot have known what I was going to say. After the General had left us, Cazeau turned to me.

"The words of one's superior," he said, "are like machine-gun bullets: you've just got to throw yourself on the ground and wait till it's all over. What were you going to say?"

"Fagerness has just been occupied by the

6th Company, and the General is firing at the Legion."

"Splendid," said Cazeau. "Perhaps they'll give it to him for breakfast." And he went out and stretched himself in the shade of a rock where the inestimable Loche had rigged up a sort of Moorish tent.

"Where did you find this variegated material, Loche?"

"In the tunnel."

"And those pegs?"

"In the tunnel."

"And that enormous revolver?"

"In the tunnel."

Tunnel No. 4 became the chief source of supply for the camp. The Germans had a store there, where you could get food, arms, clothing—anything you wanted. When we first went there, in the night-time, we tripped over a number of dead bodies, but later we learnt to pick our way among them. Eventually we took them away. We used carriage seats to make camp beds, and the green check blinds for our shelters. We also found several boxes of excellent ham. When it came on to rain we needed waterproofs, and these we also found in the tunnel. We even came across an old English naval gun, which had probably been taken from a cargo boat sunk in the harbour on April 9th and placed on the rails with its ammunition (80 rounds). Some English gunners

were sent there to put it in working order. They were sailors, and were delighted to go ashore and get hold of a gun to use against the enemy. They groped their way through the darkness, broken only by the mouth of the tunnel, to where the outline of the gun could be seen in the depths. Giving vent to their feelings, they slapped one another joyfully on the back. They talked to me in a jargon compounded of Welsh, Northumbrian and naval slang, of which I couldn't understand a word.

That gun never fired a shot. But this was no fault of theirs : we had no time to move it into a practicable position before our departure.

In the next tunnel was a French 75 with its ammunition. Its origin was even more mysterious than that of the English 12-pounder. Most of the legionaries went to the tunnel to fetch small things : revolvers, cartridges, knives (always beloved of soldiers), belts, wire, needles, buttons, and, above all, food. When the officers said to their orderlies, "Fetch me so-and-so," it always meant "from the tunnel."

It was in this way that Gegner came to be sent to the tunnel for some shaving-soap. Gegner was not very fond of the tunnel : he didn't relish the sudden cold darkness, the instruments of death, the blood-stained cloaks. They brought back too many memories. They reminded him of his journey on foot across the mountains from Rumania (where he had been a

student), pursued by the *numerus clausus*; of his travels through the mostly inaccessible regions of Central Europe; of the revolutions in Germany, the persecution of the Jews, the Nazis in Vienna. It was to fight the latter that he had joined the Legion. Yet he could not stand the sight of these green uniforms. With the greatest repugnance he lifted a loose cloak here and there, clammy in the dank darkness. Switching on a small lamp, he saw on a shoulder-strap the yellow cross-anchors of the marine infantry. He took out his knife and cut it off. He felt something of the same clutching at the heart that he used to experience at the kill: eagerness and shrinking in the same moment. He met a comrade who was returning with a fatigue-party.

"I say, is there anything left in the carriages?"

"No, they've taken everything." They spoke in German.

"Well, they've had two days at it. I reckon it's our turn next."

"It certainly is. But there are other things besides carriages. There are doors in the tunnel—hiding-places. You go and have a look."

"Sure."

"Let's go together," said the corporal.

They found a narrow passage, then a recess. They were in complete darkness. The rock smelt of damp and decay. Gegner felt the outline of a wooden door. He switched on his electric torch, which he was careful to economize.

He tried the handle. The poor fellow had the most dreadful misgivings ; he was in a blue funk, and could not utter a word. Inside, standing bolt upright, illuminated by a chink of light, was a Nazi. Gegner knew only too well a certain Nazi officer with just such a cruel grin. The man was dead, asphyxiated probably by gas from a bursting shell, and fell forward with the door. Gegner's officer never got his shaving-soap from the tunnel. Gegner bought it in Narvik, with his own money.

Among our new comrades was the Polish liaison officer. He had arrived one day with his orderly, his dog (a magnificent Airedale), and a queer sort of stick with an axe at the end, like those seen in the Tatras. He soon took his place at the Druid's table, and participated in Manche de Pelle's offerings with as great a relish as the rest of us.

Fighting continued in the mountains. The Poles had taken Ankeness and crossed by boat to Fagerness. We had sent a company from here as far as Bjess, at the end of the fjord. There we were joined and relieved by a second section of the Polish Brigade. The Colonel was thus enabled to transfer a company of the 2nd Battalion, the 5th, to support the 1st Battalion, which was advancing step by step on both sides of the railway. At the same time the Poles sought contact with us at the base of the peninsula. Peugeot had gone with the Colonel

## THE DEATH OF PEUGEOT

along the railway in front of the 1st Battalion when its advance came to a halt. It was here that a machine-gun bullet shattered his breast.

The men did not often talk about death. What was the use? It was there, ever-present, close, sudden. Its nearness was a normal part of our existence, like the air, the snow, the mountains and the sea. Death was not to us an eventuality, as in town-life, in peace-time, to be fought against by desperate application of medicines, comforts, warmth, and a paraphernalia of doctors and priests, paraded before the eyes of the world: an avoidable evil which, if it must come, is obscured beneath a show of wreaths and ceremonies. Here it was never hidden; it was an inevitable daily occurrence, undisguised by artificial refinements. We had seen men die, we had watched them in their last agonies, we had picked up shattered remains on all sides. Men disappeared one after another from the company, the section, or the mess-room. There seemed nothing remarkable in their going, even though you might have been talking and laughing with them the day before.

How was it, then, that Peugeot's death affected me so deeply? Was it because I, too, but for an unexpected counter-order, might have accompanied the Colonel on that fateful advance reconnaissance? Was it because the main battle was over and we thought there was little chance of any further casualties? Or was it perhaps

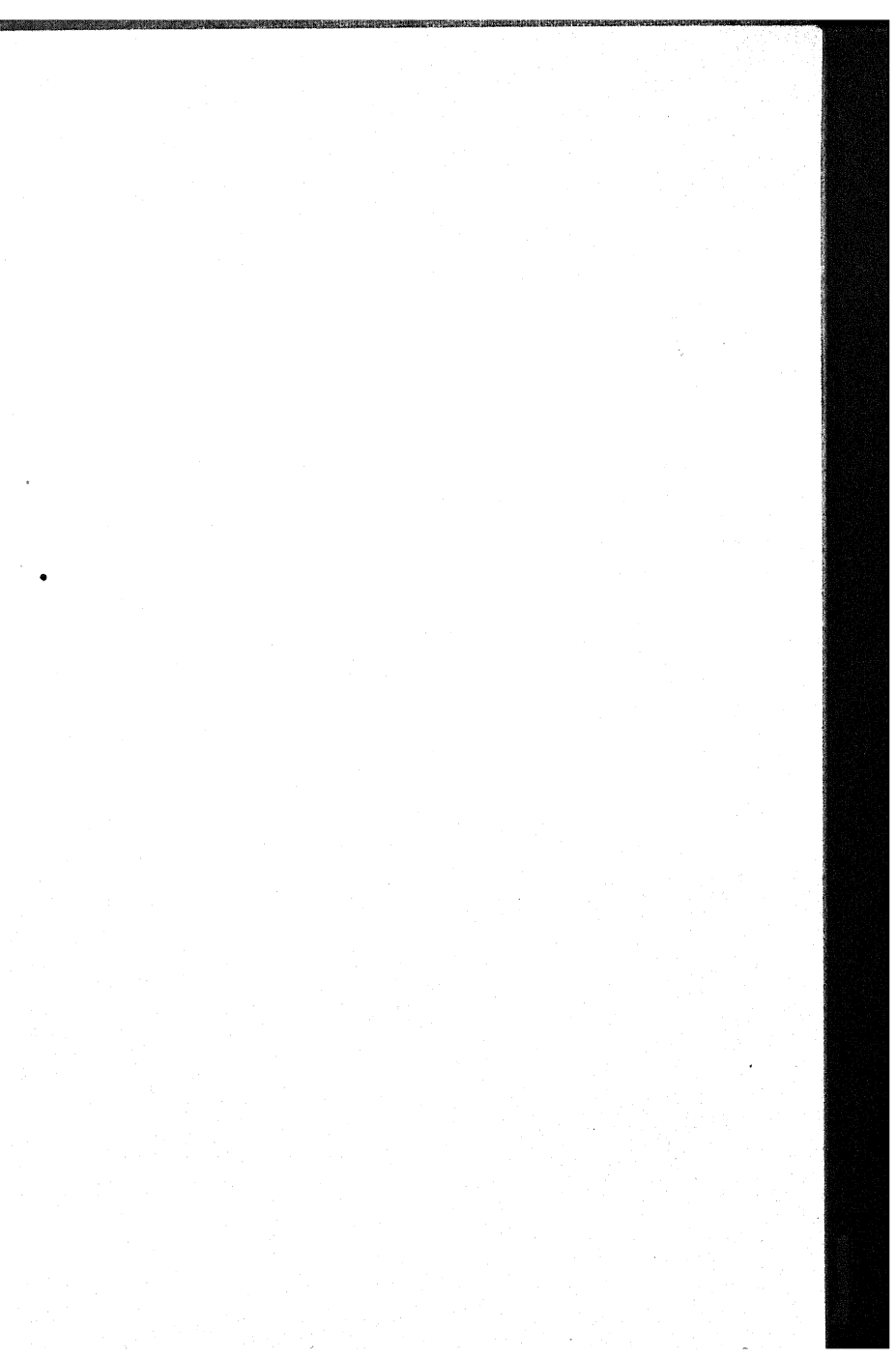


because I felt a particular regard for this man? None of these reasons really seems to explain it. Counter-orders are frequent in war, and death cannot be cheated, anyway. Then, again, I hardly knew the man. Coming over on the boat we never sat at the same table. He kept with his own men. All we had done was to exchange a few words about his cousin, a colleague of mine in the Chamber, and to chat about ski-ing (we took the same tracks together in the mountains). At the camp at Scarness he was not quartered near us, and at Tilboten he had gone on board the *Havelock* hurriedly, with his mortars, in advance of the others.

One day, at Ojord, where he was billeted in a comfortable house at the back of the Colonel's H.Q., I went to see him about some duties. He offered me milk and bilberry syrup, while he continued with the task of washing his feet. He had natural, unaffected ways, and knew his job perfectly.

The day before his death he came to dine with us. We had established a sort of mess-room close to the shore. It was a beautiful day. The boats heaved gently on the water, and the mules were grazing among the trees. The snow had melted and the grass was sweet and cool. We sat down, cursing the dampness good-humouredly.

"I don't care," laughed Peugeot, "Look what I've got!" And he brought out from





*Capitaine P. O. Lapie, and one of his comrades of the Foreign Legion*

## RECONNAISSANCE IN THE MOUNTAINS

under his cape a wash-basin made of black rubber. "You can use it for all sorts of things," he went on. "Even for washing! But it's most handy at night time, on duty, for sitting on."

I believe that is all I knew of Peugeot. But his death affected me in a way I shall never be able to explain. We had passed the emotional age when young lieutenants indulge in heroic gestures of friendship. We had never betrayed any feelings to each other, never shared a common danger, never drunk our blood in a cup of wine, like the young barbarians. And yet my sorrow was so great that it must have shown on my face when the news reached us and Peugeot's orderly brought his belongings to the Colonel, seated at his huge stone table: a watch, some letters, and the black rubber wash-basin. I felt I was going to break down before my comrades, and stole away behind the rocks, far from all that remained on earth of Robert Peugeot.

Later the Norwegians and the ski-scouts of the Legion made a reconnaissance to the centre of the peninsula, high up in the mountains, in order to clear it of any remaining Germans. An unexpected contact was made with the Poles by an advance reconnaissance party who had lost their bearings, but who, by the aid of good fortune, had made a bold move across the base of the peninsula by crossing the German lines.

The lot of Geoffroy and his skiers was not so happy. They spent four days in the snow, hanging on to escarpments, dragging their skis after them erratically, and having constantly to take cover from an enemy who still prowled about the heights and who had the advantage of knowing the country. Revictualling was difficult and for some days impossible. They came back exhausted, starving and parched, but happy in the thought that they had, as it were, conquered a whole acre of snow and granite. They had little to tell; as Geoffroy said, these adventures are all made up of tiny details: "a ridge we couldn't cross, a fellow out of breath, a road we lost, the provision party that never turned up," and so on. But what scenery, what an incredible view, the towering mountain with the sea 4,000 feet below, and all the vast expanse of countryside! They had also been machine-gunned from the air.

Geoffroy provided a striking example of that military detachment of which the Colonel so often spoke. The "good things of life" did not exist for him. He bore on his face the marks of a sublime asceticism. When he wore his snow-cape, his bare bony head, with its steel spectacles, might have been that of a monk. Even his mirth savoured of the monastery. I seem to remember, indeed, from a remark he made during a service for our dead, that he was a devout Catholic.

## A SERVICE FOR THE FALLEN

This service, held at Narvik on May 30th, was a strange ceremony. It took place in the Protestant church at 11 o'clock at night. The Lutheran cathedral of Narvik is a large square stone building. The interior was very dark. Three coffins were placed before the altar, one French, one Norwegian, and one English, each covered with a flag. This was the only touch of colour in the church, with its black wooden pews. A few candles were burning, casting a dim light on the scene. The soldiers, wearing their helmets, filed into the pews and sat down. The Norwegian congregation took their seats at the back. A somewhat reedy harmonium began to play; the congregation joined in the hymn. Was it "A safe stronghold our God is still"? I cannot remember. Whatever it was, it was loud, heavy, and grim. There followed a silence. The pastor stepped to the edge of the altar, in front of the coffins. The midnight sun slanting through the windows fell upon his face. He wore a long sixteenth-century gown of black velvet with a white ruff. In a grave and dignified voice he uttered words which we could not understand, though the name of God and reference to the war seemed to recur frequently. After he had spoken, another Lutheran hymn was sung, then the pastor emerged again from the shadows and made a sign with his head. A soldier rose from the second pew, took off his helmet, and, in his goatskin and turn-over ski-

stockings, went up to the altar and opened a book. To our astonishment he began intoning in Latin. A kind of magic proceeded from the lips of this man, who was normally quite undistinguished. His huge unprepossessing features seemed imbued with a mysterious power, and to hear the Latin words of the *chant des morts* echo through the Lutheran church was an extraordinarily moving experience. Even the Colonel was filled with emotion. Like myself, he had attended Mass many times, especially the Requiem Mass. He concealed his feelings in his usual quiet manner.

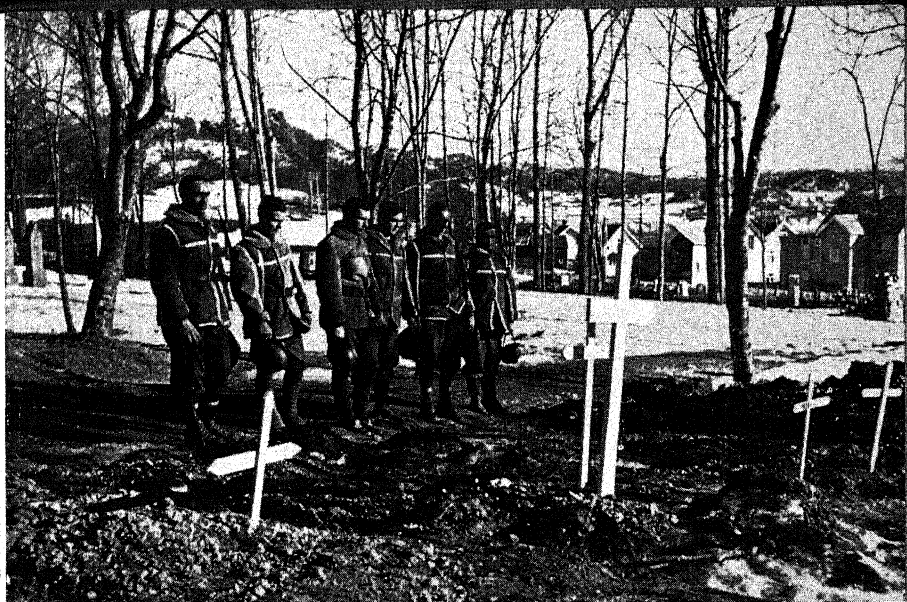
"Laurent got through it quite well," he said.

Outside, the troops paid homage, and the coffins were placed on lorries from which we had not had time to remove the advertising signs with their gaudy colours. The Legion and the Norwegians walked on either side. The people watched the scene with more curiosity than feeling. I remarked on this to the man next to me, a young Narvik fellow who had been of great assistance to us, who spoke English and was very intelligent.

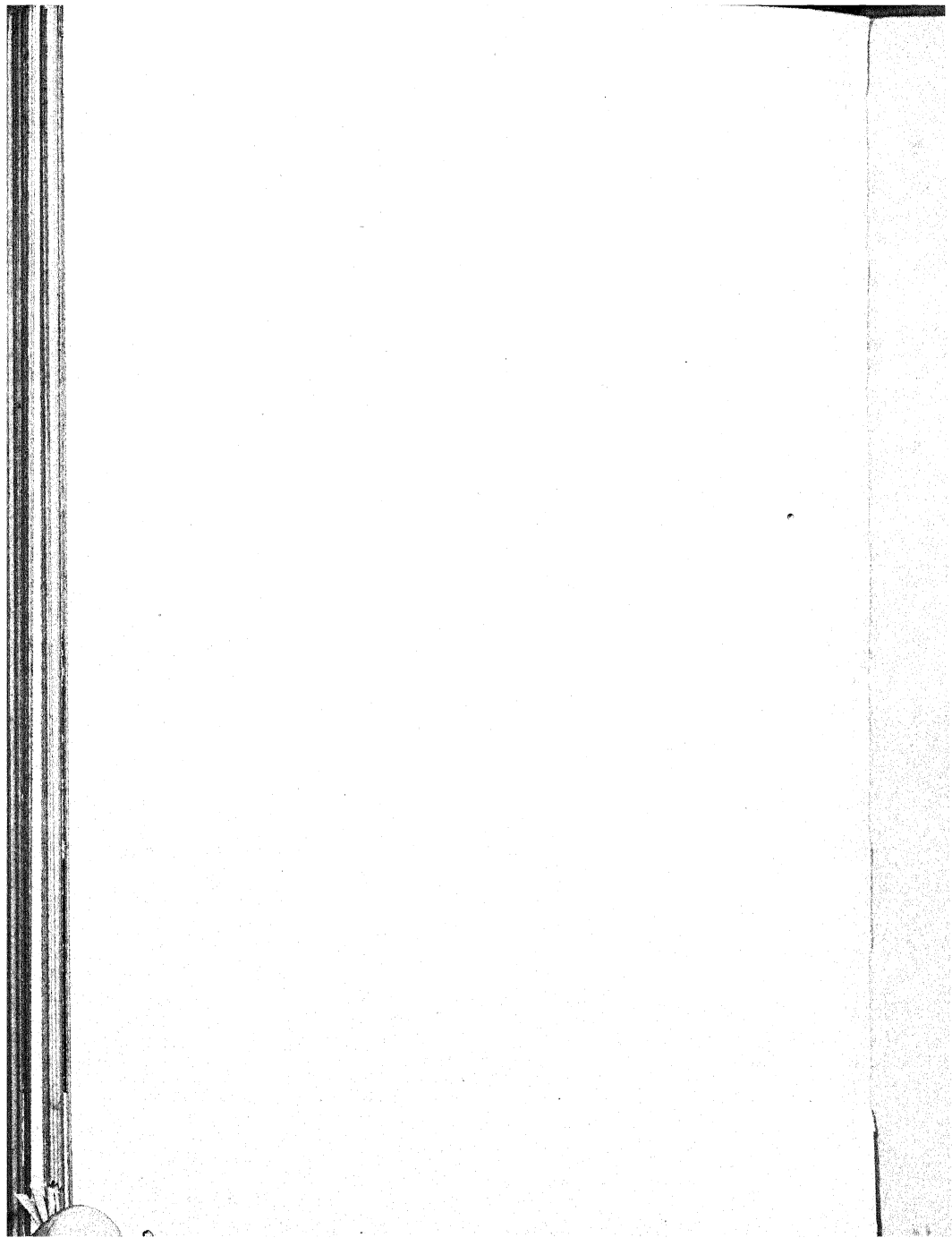
"What do you expect?" he replied. "You can understand it. Not for hundreds of centuries have they seen so many soldiers."

This was true, and the phrase set me thinking of many things: of the neutrals, of military education, of international politics, of the rôle





*The first graves  
After Narvik, on the way to Orneset. The Colonel (right)  
questioning a German prisoner (left) ; the author (centre).*



## WE BURY THE VICTORIOUS DEAD

of the neutrals in the League of Nations, both in the last few years and the last few months.

With these thoughts turning in my mind, I reached the cemetery. Outside the cemetery proper, on the other side of the railway, opposite Narvik Bay, by the peninsula of Ojord from which they had set out, we buried the victorious dead, in coffins made by the inhabitants of the town. The Colonel bade them a military farewell, with an individual salute for each of the officers. The pastor, with an attendant carrying a bucket of earth and a spade, moved over the sloping field, full of the scent of spring and dotted with new-made graves, uttered a prayer, and sprinkled a heap of earth over each.

"Remember that thou art dust, and shalt return to that from which thou art made," he said to the Norwegians, English and French who had mingled their blood with the dust in the soil of Narvik.

## CHAPTER IX

### FAREWELL TO NORWAY

"**S**ALUT," said the Colonel. He had replied mechanically to the salute of a man who was passing, then halted suddenly.

"Who are you?" he said.

"Legionary Samarsam, sir."

"Where do you belong?"

"Third Company, sir."

"Where are you going?"

"To the first-aid post, sir."

The man seemed to have no face, it was so completely covered with blood. He had one arm in a sling and leaned on a stick.

"But there are plenty of stretcher-bearers. I've had a truck put on the railway specially for the wounded. You've got no excuse."

"They told me I could walk, so I said 'All right.' They said, 'You'll find someone on the road.' But I haven't found anybody yet. A legionary must keep on keeping on."

The Colonel had the man attended to immediately.

"He's been walking for nearly two hours," he said. "And do you know what kept him going? It's that phrase they've been drumming

into his head ever since he joined the Legion : ' A legionary must keep on keeping on.' It's a neat slogan, like the one in the canteen : ' Alcohol kills, but the Legionary has no fear of death.'

" These first-aid posts are very badly organized. I shall have to look into them myself. And yet it's all very simple. There's only one means of evacuation : the railway-track leading to Warner's boats. Incidentally, Warner deserves the Croix de Guerre, the old devil. What do you think he did yesterday ? He went so far ahead to pick up the wounded that he got among the Germans. A bit more, and he'd have brought some of them back with him."

Major Warner, rubicund and always in a hurry, was a professor well known in Scotland. He had joined the service for the duration of the war, and far from remaining to tend the wounded in his hospital " puffer," as he was entitled to—as indeed it was his place to do—he would go in front to supervise the stretcher-parties whenever he had a moment to spare. The legionaries knew of this ; they had seen him do it, and they loved him for it.

The railway-track stretched before us with its innumerable sleepers. It was tiring to walk over it, and equally exhausting to walk alongside.

" The Narvik railway," declared the Colonel, " the railway-track—we've heard just about enough of it. We've examined it on our plans, on our maps—we've looked at it from Ojord

## FAREWELL TO NORWAY

opposite. What about it? It's just like any other railway, and now that we've taken it we've got to leave it."

The order had, in fact, been given. The Colonel had himself conveyed it orally to Commandant Boyer-Resses, explaining to him the method of withdrawal for the 1st Battalion, which was holding the front line.

We returned along the track towards Narvik, the "conquered" town. A poor sort of joke! It was going to be difficult to explain matters to the legionaries, after they had been informed of the General's order of the day: "The Legion has won the first victory of the war." How could we tell them that we were leaving for another fjord, another town? They knew quite well that we were the farthest North; and the natural reaction, on putting to sea, is to say "we are going home." Besides, the Germans were there, on the Swedish border; one more push, and they would be over it. The only thing would be to say nothing till the last moment. But how were we to explain our departure to the Norwegians, to these peaceful and friendly people, to the men and women who had risked so much for us, to the soldiers who had fought by our side? Only yesterday Lefort and I had been out in a boat along the Rombaken and had passed a number of them on the rocks on either side, laughing and full of spirits. No doubt the fate of Norway would never be

decided in Norway. More than ever it was clear that the great battle was being fought in France. All the same, we had come among these people, and they were beginning to realize, after the capture of Narvik, that we were there to help them, to liberate them. What would they think now?

A number of motor-cycles with side-cars were waiting for us at the wrecked railway-station, and we drove down to the landing-stage. There were many "puffers" in the bay. For the moment they were at anchor, but at some mysterious signal, probably emanating from Duff, they began to move, and steamed alongside the frail wharf, panting all the time. It was overcast, the hills were covered in mist, and snow seemed about to fall on the mountains. Two English planes skimmed across the water like swallows before a storm—a pretty technical feat, but quite useless from the point of view of keeping a watch on the skies.

One by one the sections went down, the men marching in file with their packs loaded, thirty feet apart, at the steady pace of the legionaries. Captain Audier, at the cross-roads on the path leading to the pontoon, called the companies one by one. Each captain attended to the embarkation of his own company. As we were being transported by warships, the only baggage we were allowed to take was a single pack each. We had to leave behind the cases of ammunition,



## FAREWELL TO NORWAY

the cars, the mules, the 25-guns, and even the chests containing the company records, where these had not been divided into separate bundles. Hubert was in tears about his typewriter. He tried to put it in his pack, which already bulged so much that he was almost hidden beneath its weight. The muleteers were loth to part with their animals. They talked to them in Spanish under the birch-trees, stroked them, caressed them, sang them a last Spanish-Arab song, which they loved, and, with tears in their eyes, leapt into the boats. Lefort, who had been organizing the destruction of important points and had had his face scorched by one of the explosions, made a furious attempt to save his motor-cycles and side-cars. He succeeded in getting one of them forcibly aboard a "puffer."

"When you're on the destroyer they'll make you throw it overboard," he was told.

"We'll see," he replied. And I believe he got it back to France with him.

Captain Amilakwari, loudly protesting, utterly refused to abandon his 25's.

"I'll throw them in the sea," he said, "rather than leave a single lock or bolt for the Germans—you understand, not a single lock or bolt!"

The people of Narvik, astonished at all these troop movements, came down to the harbour. We turned them back. We had told them that we were going to other parts, but they were not so sure. There were too many boats; the whole

## JUNE 5TH AND NO NEWS FROM FRANCE

affair was too sudden ; and besides, they could see how much we had left behind. It was not a happy moment. A kind of suppressed fury weighed heavily on all of us, and we were also disturbed by the news from France. For indeed, if we were being recalled by the higher command, if the whole Ballangen expedition had gone up in smoke, France must be in desperate need of fresh troops, even of the little corps of 15,000 men which constituted the Norwegian Expeditionary Force. In any case France could not continue to supply us with men (which would have been essential), and Britain required her ships. It was now June 5th : the date of Dunkirk. Britain certainly required her ships, far more desperately than we imagined. The Norwegian campaign had cost her dearly in ships, and the Germans were drawing steadily closer to us, fjord by fjord, without anyone being able to check them (though we did not know this at the time). We had had practically no news since May 13th. I had received only one post from France, and that was on the day before we left. It consisted of about sixty letters, dating from April, a sausage, and a box of sweets. I learned later that my own people in France had had no letters for six weeks. The Legion, of course, after its experience in the African desert, was used to this sort of life ; but it was different with the other units.

For the last evening the Colonel had given

his staff permission to accept invitations in the town. As we were returning home, some children who had been waiting for us—not without an eye for reward—gathered on the steps and sang the “Marseillaise.” The contrast with the circumstances of our farewell was painful.

The next afternoon, June 6th, we rearranged the signalling orders with Commander Hubbock and Duff, to cover our taking-off in the night. At midday the General stepped on to the pontoon. He wanted to be the last man to leave Narvik. He said good-bye to the authorities. The remainder of the staff, and the medical department, went on board. No Frenchman remained in the town or in its immediate neighbourhood.

At the same time Duff took the Colonel on board his “puffer,” bound for the mouth of the Rombaken. He prepared eggs and bacon and tea for us in his triangular cabin. The Colonel went to sleep in one of the bunks. Duff and I chatted on the bridge. It was raining. In his enormous yellow oilskins he looked exactly like a fisherman of the fjords. A rowing-boat landed us on the shore. We never saw the place again after these few moments that evening. The meadows came down to the sea; some cows crossed leisurely, their bells tinkling; a small boy passed by. Then came the woods. We went up the path towards the railway-track—the same old railway—and took the road

## "BOLO" REFUSES TO ADMIT DEFEAT

to Commandant Boyer-Resses's H.Q. On the track we met some men coming down. The Colonel stopped and talked to one or two of them. The taking-off began. We scattered, to prevent the enemy on the opposite bank from seeing too much of our movements in one direction. It was pouring with rain when we came across the Commandant. He had covered himself with an enormous shield of superimposed German waterproofs. By his side was Corporal Pichin. Imitating his superior, as always, he had also spread a number of blue and green waterproofs over his head, and looked rather like a small clump of earth. The thick moss was like a vast sponge, and we sank into it almost to our knees. The last orders were now given.

The Colonel took to the railway-track again. At the advance posts, the 3rd Company was holding the slopes between the fjord and the railway. Captain de la Bollardi re, who had had to guard the camp at Scarness while we were fighting, was delighted to be at the head of a company at last, but bitterly disappointed about the retreat. He strode disconsolately up and down his hut under the dripping trees. He had grown a beard. His green eyes flashed.

"But my poor Bolo, it's not my fault this time. The higher command has given the order—your company must obey."

But explain as we might, Bolo, whose family

## FAREWELL TO NORWAY

had been legionaries for generations, with true Breton obstinacy refused to admit defeat.

The track, after leaving de Bollardiére's H.Q., curved through a cutting in the rock. Two carriages, detached by the Germans, had been left there the day before. They may have been filled with explosives, or possibly intended to block the line. No one knew ; for they had not exploded. It did not appear to be a trap, for one of them contained the commander's desk with all its papers, maps, and letters, far too complete to be a mere trail of false information.

It took us another two hours to reach the other advance-post company. Fortunately it had stopped raining and we had bright sunshine all the way. It was tiring work climbing through the heavy mosses and lichens, but the Colonel plodded on steadily. A Norwegian officer, who accompanied us on this last journey, spoke to me about his life in Oslo, about Norway, and how he had once gone out in similar country to this and shot woodcock. Still we climbed. A legionary whom we were taking with us as a prospective runner began to falter, then wheeled round in circles, and finally sat down.

"You're not used to the mountains," I remarked to him.

"I don't know about that," he replied. "I haven't had any sleep. I'm dog-tired."

"Have some chocolate."

"No, thanks."

## WE CLIMB ON OUR LAST MARCH

"Yes, do. Sit down and get a breather. But don't go to sleep."

That was all he needed. We had not gone far, but lack of sleep, food without vitamins, and the abrupt change from sea level to mountain air no doubt had an enervating effect on us all. What can it have been like for those who had had to fight every inch of the way up here? An officer drew our attention to a rocky ridge above a wall of snow, with which Captain Puchois, still wearing his monocle, appeared to be grappling desperately, yelling at the top of his falsetto voice: "Don't come near me, for God's sake!" The officer was not aware that for two days Puchois had been struggling with a piece of his helmet which had been blown off by a bomb and had lodged in the lobe of his ear.

There were now no longer any trees; sometimes we walked on short grass, sometimes over smooth rocks. At last we reached the top. A bitterly cold wind rushed up and struck us in the face. At the same moment some 'planes swooped out of the clouds, machine-gunned the hill-top and passed over. We followed them with our eyes. They were going to bomb the base at Lilberg (where we had placed a battery), and, as we learned later, the railway.

The Captain came to meet us; he and his men actually lived on these heights, battered by winds, 'planes, and machine-guns. He spoke French with a near-East accent. Here there

## FAREWELL TO NORWAY

were no trees, no grass—nothing but rocks, nowhere to sleep, nowhere to dig the famous “legionary’s grave,” the small rectangular ditch with a recess for shelter from the wind and a channel for water. Water had collected in the hollows of the rocks, and the wind blew in all directions. The landscape consisted entirely of rocks of a uniform grey broken by brilliant streaks of ore. Down below, the Rombaken, now a narrow strip of water, shone steel-blue between its cliffs. The snow had entirely disappeared, except on the highest ridges, and still no tree could be seen.

We went down and reached the railway-track again, and met more processions of men. At about nine o’clock we arrived at the tunnel which commanded the embarkation-point. The legionaries had lit a fire and were heating wine over it. They gave some to the men, who were soaked through with rain and sweat after their journey, and now had to await the hour of departure in the foul air of the tunnel. They were glad to sit down for a moment.

The officer of the guard gave us an account of the air-raid.

“The poor devils thought they were safe over there, sir, with a carriage blocking the track and a rock over their heads. They hid themselves in the ditch. But a stick of bombs fell right on top of the rock.”

Nearly all of them had been killed. There



they lay, the legionaries we had just passed on the track chatting merrily, and now set rigidly like statues, which, covered as they were with rock-dust, they strangely resembled : unknown warriors of the new war.

Before we left, they were buried near a tree, by the side of the village school. From now onwards our movements were carried out without a hitch. The Colonel went into a house to rest. There were no chairs. The woodwork was painted mauve, salmon, and sky-blue. A drawer in the middle of one piece of furniture had apparently just been emptied : there was a heap of photographs, school-reports, and small notebooks. As in the Sarre, what impressed me most about these abandoned houses was not what was destroyed but what was left : a portrait hanging on the wall, a sacred image, a framed school certificate. Little attachments of people who had not acquired the great detachment.

"Well," said the Colonel, "what do you think of the Norwegian campaign? Not even a little bit of glory. We take Narvik, and then we clear out like a lot of blasted idiots. It's a poor sort of joke. Of course, if we start asking ourselves what reason there is behind it all, as the owner of this house probably did, it does seem a bit discouraging."

"The reason, Colonel," said the Norwegian lieutenant, "is that we refuse to be turned into a colony. Even the fisherman here understands

## FAREWELL TO NORWAY

what it means if they restrict his fishing rights, control his schools, and torture his pastor. Only he hasn't got the imagination to foresee it."

"Yes," said the Colonel, "that's what happens to all neutrals—and by neutrals I mean every country that goes to war against its will. Civilization confers so many benefits on mankind that we forget that other peoples are unhappy, that they are fired by different ideals, and that they want to spread those ideals everywhere. Do you remember that pastor fellow we took prisoner, that I examined yesterday evening? A pure Nazi. You need a passion like that to win this war. If we haven't got something better to offer these chaps, we're beaten already. It's not just a game of rival tanks and planes. It's a question of ideals. We shall soon see how things are going in France. But I'm very uneasy: people don't like killing—because it's so cruel, and they don't like being killed—because life is sweet. In that case, they shouldn't go to war at all."

We went outside into the open. The last sections were filing along the pathways. They moved under cover of the trees, avoiding the bends where the enemy might catch sight of them, and passed rapidly over the hill-tops. The iron-bottomed boats were waiting by the shore to take them to the "puffers." Some of these were to carry us to the destroyers, others to the transports. The last men of all

## THE UNKNOWN LEGIONARY

ran across the field. The Colonel was the last on the beach ; a young girl came out from a nearby house and handed him a glass of milk. " Come on," he said to me, and went on board. As I climbed aboard the destroyer I caught sight, on one of the " puffers," of the fair and downy head of Duff.

" Good-bye, Duff ! " I cried.

" Ah, Duff, dear Duff ! " cried the Colonel.

" Good-bye ! "

" Good-bye, Colonel, good-bye," said Duff, and with his " puffer " flagship he lined up with another man-of-war.

The men were all crowded together on our ship. She cut steadily and swiftly through the waves. One of the men, who had been carried on board, wounded during the retreat, had just died. He lay on the after-deck, draped in the tricolour. The guard was assembled. The English officers went in search of the Colonel. Prayers were read, rifle-shots sounded—the last French shots to be heard in Norway—and the flag, unfolded by British sailors, let slip into the waters of the fjord the body of the unknown legionary.

## POSTSCRIPT

THE reader may be interested to know what became of the legionaries, who I hope are by now his friends.

After leaving Norway, they waited for a few hours off the coast of Scotland, and sighted Brest on the evening of June 13th. Paris had surrendered the same day.

The Legion landed the next day and dispersed to their various quarters in the suburbs of the town.

The General had set out to find the French Headquarters to receive orders from his superiors. When he returned he looked worn and perplexed. He showed nothing of this at the officers' meeting, but when I met him face to face in his office at the Château St. Jean, in Brest, and asked him what he thought of the disaster he replied simply: "The French Army no longer exists," and turned his head away.

Nevertheless, orders were issued in the night, and on Sunday morning, the 16th, the Legion embarked in a westerly direction to defend the peninsula of Brittany with the *chasseurs alpins*. They had to take up a position approximately on the line of the Rance. The orders that arrived were absurdly contradictory. The

## POSTSCRIPT

Colonel's Headquarters were moved, during a reconnaissance, to the rear of villages that had already been occupied by the Germans.

On the 17th, while at lunch in a small Breton village, the legionaries heard Marshal Pétain's announcement of the proposed armistice. For the first time for many years they wept in silence. But their fighting spirit remained. "We have our orders," said the Colonel. "I shall advance!" The same evening, however, he saw German motor machine-gun units pass by on the road, while he and his officers crouched in the bushes.

They either received orders which took no account of the presence of the enemy, or else no orders at all. There was only one thing to do : make for the sea. By one means or another, the officers and men of the 13th Demi-Brigade succeeded, one by one, in reaching England. I lost touch with them completely for some days. Then one day I suddenly came across a legionary on a London bus. He told me where he was quartered, and I soon found the Colonel and my comrades.

When King George visited the Legion at Aldershot camp, the flag which the Norwegian women had embroidered was used as an emblem in doing the honours, and when the King accepted the wine of honour in the officers' mess, the swastika flag which had been picked up on the battlefield of Narvik was hung as a trophy.

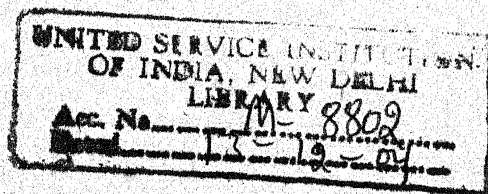
# POSTSCRIPT

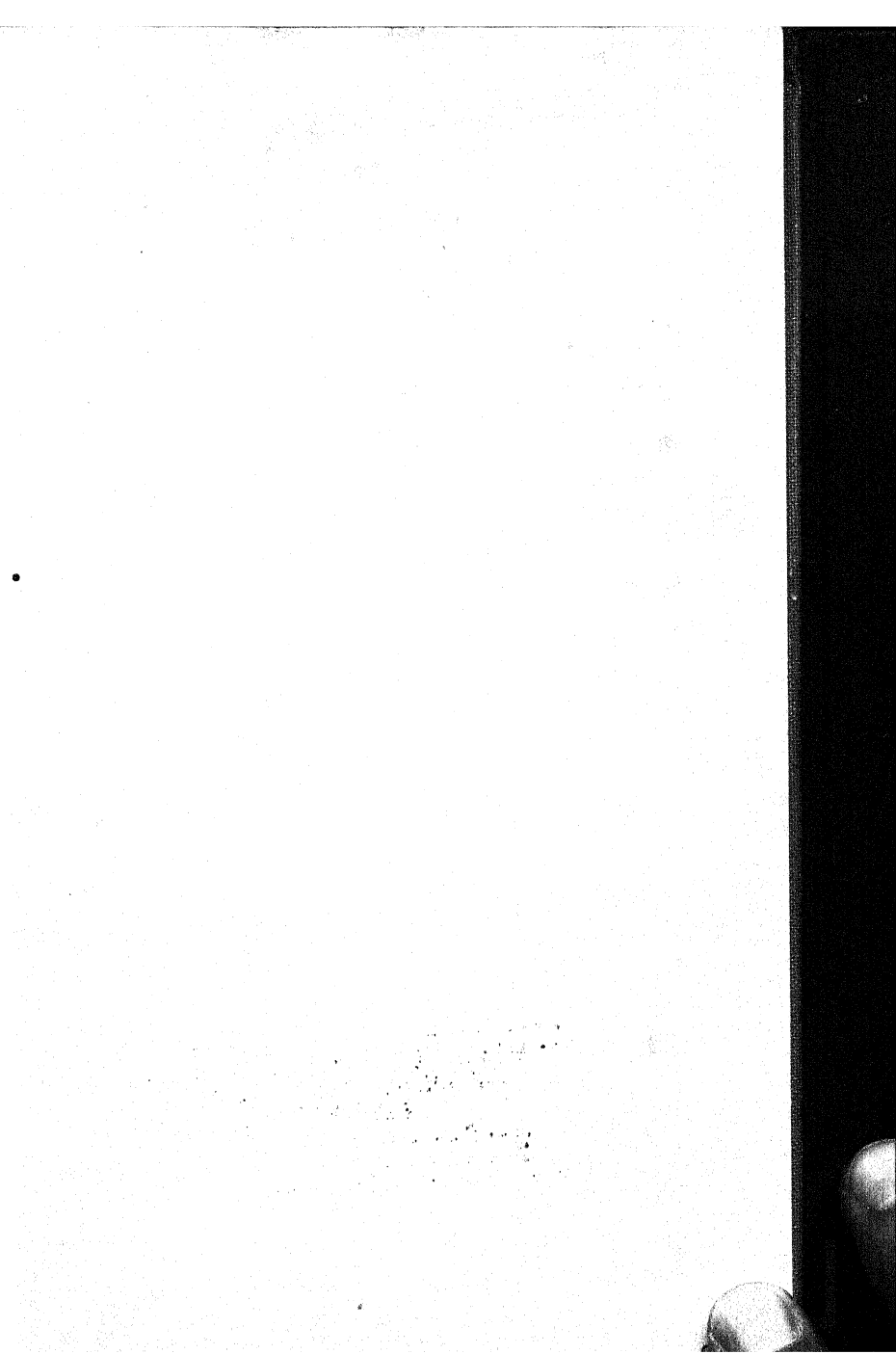
The Foreign Legion Brigade of Free Frenchmen sailed for Africa with General de Gaulle at the end of August 1940.

On September 23rd they were at Dakar, and had a great welcome when they arrived at Yaunde in the Cameroons. Here a parade was held in honour of General de Gaulle, and in the evening the whole town was lit up with lamps improvised out of gourds.

Later they conquered Gaboon, and were the first to land at Libreville, the capital, where they celebrated Armistice Day.

No doubt in days to come they will add fresh pages of glory to their history.









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